The New Criterion

April 1998

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

Notes & Comments, 1
Reflections on a cultural revolution, VIII *by Roger Kimball*, 4
Paul Johnson's America *by Hadley Arkes*, 12
Proust's masterwork *by Joseph Epstein*, 19
The better James Baldwin *by Brooke Allen*, 29
Four poems by Michelangelo *translated & with an introduction by John Frederick Nims*, 37

Theater: Critics & collectors *by Mark Steyn*, 42; **Art:** Manet & Monet *by Karen Wilkin*, 47; Robert Delaunay at the Guggenheim *by Mario Naves*, 53; **The media:** Nonpartisan review *by James Bowman*, 56
Books: *Georg Solti, with Harvey Sachs* Memoirs *reviewed by John Simon*, 62; Three books on Henry Hobson Richardson *reviewed by J. Duncan Berry*, 67; *Jean-Paul Goujon* Léon-Paul Fargue *reviewed by Katherine Knorr*, 71; **Notebook:** The British Library *by Francis Morrone*, 75

Volume 16, Number 8, $4.75

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jedd Novatt

Sculpture

Larry Poons

Paintings

April 7 to 25

Salander-O'Reilly Galleries

20 East 79 Street New York 10021 Tel (212) 879-6606

Monday-Saturday 9:30 to 5:30

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JOAN SNYDER

AT THE BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART ***WORKS ON PAPER*** MARCH 7 – JUNE 14, 1998

AT HIRSCHL & ADLER MODERN ***NEW PAINTINGS*** APRIL 25 – JUNE 12, 1998

CATALOGUE AVAILABLE

HIRSCHL & ADLER MODERN 21 EAST 70TH NEW YORK NEW YORK 10021 TEL 212 535 8810

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

db
DENISE BIBRO
FINE ART, INC

529 WEST 20TH STREET, 4TH FL., NY, NY 10011 • (212) 647-7030
http://www.artnet.com www.citysearch.com/nycbibrofineart

GALLERY & ART ADVISORY SERVICES

- REPRESENTATION
- PROMOTION
- ESTATE SALES
- ART PLACEMENT

NORA SPEYER
Trees and Flowers
March 17–April 18, 1998

Lilies and Gloriosa Daisies, Oil on canvas, 40″ × 40″

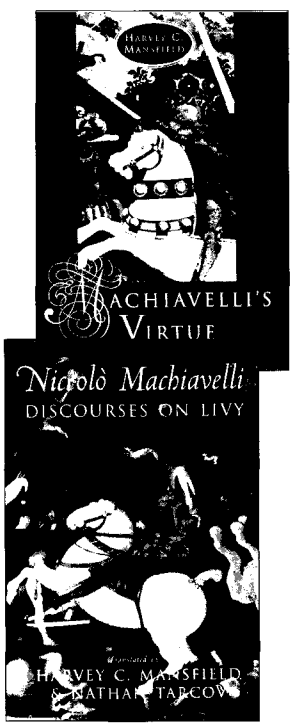
Look Out,
Ol' Mach's Back . . . in Paper

Machiavelli's Virtue
HARVEY C. MANSFIELD

"[Mansfield] emerges from this writing, exquisitely patient and refined, with lessons for our current politics that are both apt and unsettling. The ground, one would think, is ancient and familiar, but Mansfield manages to draw out some understandings, or recognitions, jarringly new."
Hadley Arkes, *New Criterion*
Paper $15.00

Discourses on Livy
NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI
Translated by Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov

"There have been in the last hundred years two landmark works in the English language in the textual study and translation of Machiavelli's books. . . . Now comes the Mansfield Tarcov translation of the *Discourses* which deserves to be considered the third landmark of its kind in the English language." Anthony J. Parel, *Review of Politics*
Paper $13.00



Available in bookstores.

The University of Chicago Press
Visit us at http://www.press.uchicago.edu

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The New Criterion *April 1998*

Editor & Publisher *Hilton Kramer*
Managing Editor *Roger Kimball*
Poetry Editor *Robert Richman*
Associate Editor *David Yezzi*
Assistant to the Editors *Laura Tendler*
Editorial Intern *Maxwell Watman*

Publisher 1982–1994 *Samuel Lipman*

Contributors to this issue

Brooke Allen reviews books regularly for *The New Criterion*.

Hadley Arkes's essay "Thomas Jefferson on Race and Revolution" appeared in our January 1997 issue.

J. Duncan Berry reviewed David Watkin's *Sir John Soane* in our November 1997 issue.

James Bowman is the American editor of the London *Times Literary Supplement* and the film critic of *The American Spectator*.

Joseph Epstein is the author most recently of *Life Sentences* (Norton) and the editor of *The Norton Book of Personal Essays*.

Roger Kimball's essay in this issue is the eighth in his series on America's cultural revolution.

Katherine Knorr is a deputy editor of the *International Herald Tribune*.

Francis Morrone's *Architectural Guidebook to New York City* is being reissued this month by Gibbs Smith.

Mario Naves reviews art regularly for *The New Criterion*.

John Frederick Nims's *The Complete Poems of Michelangelo* is forthcoming from the University of Chicago Press in the fall.

John Simon reviews theater for *New York* magazine and films for *National Review*.

Mark Steyn is the film critic of the London *Spectator*.

Karen Wilkin's latest book is *Cézanne* (Abbeville).

Published monthly except July and August by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc., 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019, a nonprofit public foundation as described in Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue code, which solicits and accepts contributions from a wide range of sources, including public and private foundations, corporations, and the general public. ISSN 0734-0222. April 1998, Volume 16, Number 8. Subscriptions: $36 for one year, $65 for two. Outside the United States, add $7 per year. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Subscribers: send all remittances, changes of address, and subscription inquiries to The New Criterion, P.O. Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834. For subscription problems call (800) 783-4903. Copyright © 1998 by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc. Newsstand distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., One Media Way, 12406 Rt. 250, Milan, OH 44846. (800) 221-3148. Available in microfilm from University Microfilms, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. All correspondence should be addressed to The New Criterion, 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019. (212) 247-6980. Notice of nonreceipt must be sent to the Office Manager within three months of the issue date. Internet: http://www.newcriterion.com E-mail: letters@newcriterion.com

Advertising: Galleries & fine arts: Fred Stern, 44 Paulin Boulevard, Leonia, NJ 07605. (201) 947-2674.
Publishers & others: Richard A. Vaughan, 129 Phelps Avenue, Rockford, IL 61108. (815) 398-8569.

The New Criterion is designed by Alvin and James Eisenman. It is set in 10-point Galliard and is printed by Science Press in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, USA.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

New in cloth & paper

The Flow of Art

Essays and Criticisms

Henry McBride

Edited by Daniel Catton Rich; Preface by Lincoln Kirstein
With a new foreword by Hilton Kramer

"A wonderful collection of short pieces.

...Gossipy, chatty, full of overheard conversations, unexpectedly sharp judgments, remarkable predictions....McBride is one of that small band who have made art criticism a branch of literature."
-Sanford Schwartz
The New Republic

"Important for the history of criticism in America."
-Choice

$35.00 cloth; $16.00 paperbound

Yale University Press
P.O. Box 209040
New Haven, CT 06520
www.yale.edu/yup/
1-800-YUP-READ

THE BOSTON BOOK REVIEW
http://www.BostonBookReview.com

The Best of Both Worlds

The Apollonian

The Bostonian

The Dionysian

The thinking person's literary arts magazine with fiction, poetry, interviews, essays and book reviews.

Subscribe to the BOSTON BOOK REVIEW.
Discover the well-written.

In addition, sign up to receive our **FREE** bimonthly email Gazette for info about authors, new articles and reviews, BBR bestsellers and best picks, occasional short reviews, and more. Send an email with **subscribe** in the subject line to Gazette@soapbox.BostonBookReview.com.

nc

SUBSCRIPTIONS
1 yr. (10 issues) $24.00
Canada and International add $16.00

Name_____

Address _____

City _____State __Zip _____

Credit Card Payments: *(or call 617 497-0344)*

No. _____Exp. date:____

Signature: _____

☐ VISA ☐ MC ☐ DISC ☐ AMEX

Or send check to:

THE BOSTON BOOK REVIEW
30 Brattle Street, 4th floor
Cambridge, MA 02138

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Notes & Comments: April 1998

Democratic despotism, I

Perhaps the most prescient and melancholy chapter in Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* is "What Sort of Despotism Democratic Nations Have to Fear," which appears in the second volume of that great work. If despotism were to establish itself in modern democratic nations, Tocqueville predicted, it is likely that it would assume a different character from the tyrannies other regimes have from time to time given rise to. Democratic despotism, he says, would "be more extensive and more mild; it would degrade men without tormenting them." In this sense, Tocqueville continues, "the species of oppression by which democratic nations are menaced is unlike anything that ever before existed in the world."

> It would be like the authority of a parent if, like that authority, its object was to prepare men for manhood; but it seeks, on the contrary, to keep them in perpetual childhood. . . . it every day renders the exercise of the free agency of man less useful and less frequent; it circumscribes the will within a narrower range and gradually robs a man of all the uses of himself. The principle of equality has prepared men for these things; . . . the supreme power then extends its arm over the whole community. It covers the surface of society with a network of small complicated rules, minute and uniform, through which the most original minds and the most energetic characters cannot penetrate, to rise above the crowd. The will of man is not shattered, but softened, bent, and guided; men are seldom forced by it to act, but they are constantly restrained from acting. Such a power does not destroy, . . . but it enervates, extinguishes, and stupefies a people, till each nation is reduced to nothing better than a flock of timid and industrious animals, of which the government is the shepherd.

The "shepherd" or, in current parlance, the "nanny." It is depressing to contemplate the extent to which Tocqueville's fears have been realized in contemporary American society. Indeed, simply tabulating the damage done to our culture by that "network of small complicated rules, minute and uniform," would be a large and important task. Perhaps the most fearsome engine of democratic despotism has been the law —or, more accurately, the abuse of legal power to engineer mediocrity and conformity. Examples of this are legion. It is part of what the commentator Walter Olson aptly summed up as "the litigation explosion," an explosion that has reverberated disastrously throughout society, affecting everything from the way we deal with one another on the job to the way we educate our children.

We were prompted to think about this gloomy phenomenon the other day when

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The New York Times, on March 11, ran a front-page story by Ethan Bonner reporting that high-school guidance counselors are being sued by parents if their children fail to be admitted to the college of their choice. We know it sounds ridiculous. But as a result of this latest legalistic folly, guidance counselors are taking out liability insurance and are becoming increasingly reluctant to disclose damaging truths to college admissions officials. According to Joyce E. Smith, executive director of the National Association for College Admission Counseling, "Counselors are becoming afraid of telling the full truth. They'll write that Johnny took these courses and was a great student, but they won't tell you that Johnny burned down the gym"—or, to take a real-life example, murdered one's mother, as did one Gina Grant. Mr. Bonner reports that Ms. Grant killed her mother by striking her repeatedly on the head with a lead-crystal candlestick. This little detail was not included in her application to Harvard, even though the application asked about past criminal and disciplinary problems. In due course, she was accepted for admission until an anonymous mailing caused Harvard officials to reverse their decision.

One of the chief culprits in this grotesque situation is the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, one of the most destructive and politically correct pieces of legislation to be foisted on the American public since Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs in the early 1960s. As Mr. Bonner notes, past alcohol and drug use by students, which once would have been reported to college admissions officers as a matter of course, is now shielded under the Act. Ditto with other psychological problems. Thus it happened that the admissions dean at Lawrence University at Appleton, Wisconsin, found himself subject to investigation by the Office of Civil Rights at the Department of Education when he turned down a student whose grades plummeted after a nervous breakdown. The Office of Civil Rights ultimately cleared Lawrence, but only on condition that its application form no longer query counselors about "factors that might interfere with a student's performance, either from discipline, chronic illness or emotional stability." So being a drunk or a drug addict or a psychological wreck—to say nothing of having a criminal record—is apparently now to be regarded as a protected "disability," and so such facts must not be taken into account when deciding whether a student is a fit candidate for admission to college. We have come a long way since the 1830s when Tocqueville penned his prophetic words. He saw only too well what was in the offing, but we think that even he might have been aghast at how accurately he foresaw what was to come.

Democratic despotism, II

Meanwhile, in San Francisco the militia of multiculturalism is working overtime to enforce intellectual mediocrity and strict adherence to a politically correct reading list. According to a Reuters news report, school board officials are considering a proposal requiring that up to 70 percent of school reading be books by "authors of color." "The proposed change," we are told, "would force high school teachers to select up to seven books by non-white authors for every three traditional classics by white writers."

One board member—a twenty-four-year-old co-author of this "multicultural initiative"—declared that such a change was "long overdue" and that it would make school work more "relevant" to students in San Francisco's public schools, where whites count for something less than 12 percent of the student population. Reflecting on the dismal scholastic record of African-American and Latino students, this gentleman took aim at the reading list: "Part of the reason is that the curriculum is not engaging them. Students get more interested in reading and language when they see themselves in the curriculum." Among

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

other things, what we have here is a classic case of what G. K. Chesterton called "the false theory of progress, which maintains that we alter the test instead of trying to pass the test." Then, too, we wonder what happened to the idea that great literature *expands* one's imaginative horizons? Who has thoughtfully read Homer, or Virgil, or Dante, or Shakespeare, or Milton and not "seen themselves"—and the world—more fully for the experience? And when it comes to "relevance," the primary question is not whether Homer, for example, pertains to the narrow experience of an uneducated teen in Southern California but whether that teenager's limited sympathy might be engaged and ennobled by something much larger and more lasting than his fleeting adolescent passions.

Such objections apparently do not matter among the PC police in San Francisco. Another board member who supports the initiative pondered the political failures of the traditional curriculum: "Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, for instance, has a bias against African Americans. And Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, while a great work, has an economic bias. It characterizes people based on their class." What can we say? It is not clear whether the appropriate response to such statements is outrage or pity. On balance, we think perhaps a mixture of both is called for. Pity is surely the right response when faced with such intractable stupidity: "It characterizes people based on their class"—shouldn't a person capable of uttering such reductive gibberish about *The Canterbury Tales* get some sort of government grant, perhaps under the Americans with Disabilities Act? But outrage, too, is required: after all, what we are talking about here is the possibility that many thousands of students in San Francisco will be cheated of a decent education in order that the demands of certain politically correct ideologues be appeased. In the end, anyone who cares about the students' welfare must give precedence to the outrage.

A ray of hope?

Next to the study of literature, the discipline of history has suffered most from the depredations of multiculturalism, political correctness, and all the unlovely epistemological cesspits that congregate under the rubric of "postmodernism." Even the idea of empirical truth—an idea without which the discipline of history is impossible—has been widely and variously attacked, as the Australian historian Keith Windschuttle shows brilliantly in *The Killing of History* (Free Press). We were heartened, therefore, when we heard that a group of distinguished historians, including Donald Kagan, Eugene Genovese, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Forrest McDonald, and Alan C. Kors, had decided to form the Historical Society, a new academic group "open to all who want to do serious history." Currently, the profession of history in this country is dominated by the American Historical Society, an increasingly ideological organization that stands in relation to the discipline of history as the Modern Language Association stands to the discipline of literature: namely, as a bastion of PC orthodoxy and radical sentiment. If the Historical Society can successfully challenge such orthodoxies, it will have made an immense contribution to American intellectual life. The distinction of many of its charter members gives us hope. Nevertheless a caveat is in order. Reform does not come without struggle, and struggle inevitably involves controversy. In the press release announcing the formation of the Historical Society, we were dismayed to read that its members "have no interest in endless controversies and 'culture wars.'" The "culture wars," alas, are a given of American intellectual life in the 1990s: any organization hoping to fight for truth will have to engage in them. To pretend otherwise—to pretend that the battle is taking place elsewhere or can be successfully ignored—is a guarantee of impotence. Today, the decision "to do serious history" involves a decision to stand up publicly for the truth.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Reflections on a cultural revolution: VIII

A nostalgia for Molotovs: "The New York Review"

by Roger Kimball

From the beginning it was pointless to argue about the sincerity of Radical Chic. Unquestionably the basic impulse, "red diaper" or otherwise, was sincere. But, as in most human endeavors focused upon an ideal, there seemed to be some double-track thinking going on.
—Tom Wolfe, "Radical Chic"

He oscillated . . . between identification with the Communists and violent hostility towards them. . . . At every stage, however, he endeavored to preserve his own reputation as a "Leftist," and even to represent himself and his philosophy as the embodiment of "Leftism" par excellence. *Consequently, even when attacking the Communists and reviled by them he made a point of directing far more vehement attacks against the forces of reaction, the bourgeoisie, or the United States Government.*
—Leszek Kolakowski, on Jean-Paul Sartre

The New York Review of Books occupies a special place in the annals of America's cultural revolution. Plenty of other publications—*Ramparts*, for example, and *Rolling Stone*, *The Village Voice*, even old-left stalwarts like *The Nation*—played important roles in defining the counterculture and propagating its spirit and its ideas. Some of these publications were explicitly devoted to promoting the drug culture, rock music, and sexual "liberation"; most were infused with some version of adolescent political radicalism. As the Sixties wore on, all were "against the war" in Vietnam, suspicious (to say the least) of American power, entranced by the thought of their own higher virtue. But none commanded anything like the intellectual cachet that *The New York Review* enjoyed and, to a lesser extent, continues to enjoy among the left-liberal intelligentsia. And none was, at that critical moment in the Sixties, quite so effective—or quite so pernicious—in helping to institutionalize the gospel of political radicalism among America's intellectual elite.

It is a curious story. *The New York Review* was the brainchild largely of Jason Epstein, the publishing wunderkind who created the distinguished paperback lines of Anchor Books at Doubleday and Vintage Books at Random House. By the late 1950s, the need for a serious, general-interest review was patent. The novelist and essayist Elizabeth Hardwick, who was then married to Robert Lowell and who went on to become advisory editor at *The New York Review*, summed up the received feeling in "The Decline of Book Reviewing," which *Harper's* published in 1959:

> Sweet, bland commendations fall everywhere upon the scene; a universal, if somewhat lobotomized, accommodation reigns. A book is born into a puddle of treacle; the brine of hostile criticism is only a memory. Everyone is found to have "filled a need," and is to be "thanked" for something and to be excused for "minor faults in an otherwise excellent work."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As Philip Nobile put it in *Intellectual Skywriting*, his intermittently hagiographic history of the first ten years of *The New York Review*,[1] "everybody talked about a new book review, but nobody did anything about it."

The necessary spur came during the 114-day printers' strike in 1962–63. The strike shut down all the major New York newspapers, including *The New York Times* and the *Herald Tribune*, whose book pages, along with those of *The Saturday Review*, constituted the main sources of book reviews and, not incidentally, the chief venues for book advertising. (Looking back on the reviewing scene in *The New York Review*'s second issue in the summer of 1963, Edmund Wilson remarked that "the disappearance of the *Times* Sunday book section at the time of the printers' strike only made us realize it had never existed.") Although Epstein's association with Random House precluded his being the editor of the contemplated new book review, his energy, connections, and organizational acumen brought *The New York Review* into being. It was a fateful stroke that led him to appoint the precocious Robert B. Silvers as editor. (Epstein's wife, Barbara, has been co-editor from the beginning, but it was always Silvers who imparted to the *Review* much of its intellectual and nearly all of its ideological sheen.)

Then in his early thirties, Silvers had been working as an editor at *Harper's* since 1959. Having graduated from the University of Chicago in 1947 (after just two-and-a-half years), Silvers sampled Yale Law School for a few semesters before joining the U.S. Army, which posted him to an intelligence job in Paris. In the mid Fifties, Paris was still Sartre's Paris: a Paris in which—among intellectuals, anyway—anti-Americanism was as *de rigueur* as were brittle intellectual snobbery and left-wing politics. Silvers seems to have found it an intoxicating combination. After his stint in the army, he lingered in Paris for some six years, absorbing the atmosphere and working part of the time for George Plimpton's newly launched *Paris Review* (to which he contributed an inconsequential interview with the novelist Françoise Sagan in 1956). When the Algerian conflict hotted up, French torture of Algerian prisoners became the topic du jour for all right-thinking (that is, left-leaning) intellectuals, and numerous first-hand accounts of atrocities were published, much to the consternation of the French authorities. (Of course, only details of atrocities committed by the French were wanted; atrocities committed by the Algerians were of little interest.) Sartre himself contributed a preface to one such contraband pamphlet, Henri Alleg's *La Question*, thus conferring unimpeachable prestige on this mode of political activism. Silvers followed suit by translating *La Gangrène*, a grisly account by four Algerians of their torture in Paris at the hands of the French police.[2]

I mention these details because the intellectual and political posture—indeed, even the social posture—of *The New York Review* clearly owes a great deal to Silvers's extended holiday in Paris. By all accounts, Silvers is as shy of personal publicity as Sartre was addicted to it; and where Sartre was a graphomaniac who wrote and published millions of words, Silvers seems early on to have decided against writing. According to Philip Nobile, Silvers's only published writing, apart from the two items mentioned above, is "A Letter to a Young Man About to Enter Publishing," which ran, anonymously, in a supplement to *Harper's* about "Writing in America" in 1959. But despite these differences, Sartre seems in many ways to have provided Silvers with his model of the chic modern intellectual: relentlessly haughty, cerebral, cliquish, at once socially ambitious and disdainful of society, ever in

1 *Intellectual Skywriting: Literary Politics and "The New York Review of Books"* (Charterhouse, 1974).

2 The book was published in English as *The Gangrene* (Lyle Stuart, 1960). An excerpt was published, without identifying the translator, in the March 1960 number of *Harper's*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

search of approved *gauchiste* "causes," instinctively anti-American.

The trick was knowing how and when to mix these qualities—which to emphasize, which to obscure—and at this task Silvers quickly proved himself a master. In the beginning, highbrow elements, leavened by celebrity, predominated. The first, trial issue of *The New York Review* was cobbled together on short notice in the winter of 1963. The very bulk of the issue was a testament that its time had come. It contained forty-odd pieces, including F. W. Dupee on James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, Dwight Macdonald on Arthur Schlesinger's *The Politics of Hope*, Philip Rahv (a founding editor of *Partisan Review*) on Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, Mary McCarthy on William Burroughs's *The Naked Lunch*, and W. H. Auden on David Jones's *Anathemata*; there were also reviews by Norman Mailer, Lionel Abel, Steven Marcus, Susan Sontag, Gore Vidal, and Alfred Kazin; Robert Penn Warren contributed a poem, Irving Howe wrote about *The Partisan Review Anthology*, while William Phillips, another founding editor of *Partisan Review*, wrote about Elias Canetti's *Crowds and Power*. Richard Poirier wrote about Frank Kermode, William Styron wrote about Frank Tannenbaum, Midge Decter wrote about recent novels, and Robert Jay Lifton wrote about Arata Ossada's *Children of the A-Bomb*. Elizabeth Hardwick contributed two pieces, as did Robert Lowell (an obituary of Robert Frost, who had just died, and a poem) and John Berryman (a review of Auden's *The Dyer's Hand* and three "Dream Songs").

By any measure, this was an extraordinary performance. It met, deservedly, with instant and widespread acclaim, generating more than a thousand letters. A second large issue was duly published in the summer, with only a modest falling off of celebrity, and *The New York Review* began regular fortnightly publication in the fall of 1963. Printed on newsprint (and described by some as "*Partisan Review* on butcher paper"), it instantly established itself as an indispensable journal of Left orthodoxy. At first, Silvers's main innovation was the inclusion of ever greater numbers of English writers, especially titled writers; indeed, a pronounced Anglophilia became a comically defining characteristic of the journal.

The assassination of President Kennedy marked a turning point. *The New York Review* commemorated the event with a special issue in December 1963 "largely devoted to comments . . . about the present crisis in America." One contributor to that issue noted that, "as might be expected, the assassination stimulated a good deal of cant." Indeed. And that issue of *The New York Review* provided a home for a goodly amount of cant, although what turned out to be most significant was the tone of emergency that the journal adopted. Of course the mood of the nation following Kennedy's murder did a great deal to encourage grim rhetorical histrionics. But as one looks back over the evolution of *The New York Review* through the 1960s and early 1970s, it is difficult to escape feeling that its editors regarded the assassination more as an existential tonic than as a tragedy; or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that they regarded it as a tragedy that was itself an existential tonic: a Sartrean flush of extremism that had hitherto been largely missing from *The New York Review*'s persona. In any event, with that issue a new element of radical left-wing political hectoring made its appearance in the journal's pages. It became almost deafening as the Sixties wore on; it subsequently diminished, but that was only after elite opinion in this country had migrated markedly to the left—partly under the influence of twice-monthly manifestos emanating from the *The New York Review*.

If Kennedy's assassination initiated a movement toward political fulmination, the Vietnam war precipitated a stampede. It was then, for example, that Noam Chomsky began contributing his lugubrious diatribes against American foreign policy, replete with such delicacies as his description of the Pentagon as "the most hideous institution

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on earth" ("On Resistance," December 7, 1967). It was then, too, that Mary McCarthy filed her three-part report on the socialist paradise being prepared in North Vietnam and that I. F. Stone began bludgeoning readers with his interminable essays on the American military establishment (sample title: "The War Machine Under Nixon"), which read like neo-Stalinist equivalents of those multi-part articles on staple crops with which *The New Yorker* used to anesthetize its readers.

The New York Review never lost its taste for upper-class English dons, but in the mid Sixties the dons were joined by a more demotic element. Suddenly, political firebrands like Jerry Rubin, Stokely Carmichael, Andrew Kopkind, and Tom Hayden began appearing (Rubin, Carmichael, and Hayden once each, Kopkind with ten pieces). The nadir came with the notorious issue of August 24, 1967. Headlined "Violence and the Negro," the cover announced in outsize type Kopkind's piece on Martin Luther King and Black Power and Hayden's report on the riots—what he called "The Occupation"—of Newark. Underneath was a large diagram instructing readers on the exact composition of a Molotov cocktail. (To his credit, the *Review*'s resident caricaturist David Levine, though a self-described "radical-socialist" who cheerfully supplied malevolently grotesque send-ups of President Nixon and other political figures, refused to provide a drawing of the incendiary device.)

It was about this time that even some of *The New York Review*'s ideological allies began having doubts about the direction that the journal was taking. The late Irving Howe, himself a socialist and founding editor of *Dissent*, noted scathingly in 1968 that the *Review* had managed to achieve "a link between campus 'leftism' and East Side stylishness, the worlds of Tom Hayden and George Plimpton." Howe continued:

> Opposition to communist politics and ideology is frequently presented in the pages of the *New York Review* as if it were an obsolete, indeed a pathetic, hangover from a discredited past or worse yet, a dark sign of the CIA. A snappish and crude anti-Americanism has swept over much of its political writing. . . . And in the hands of writers like Andrew Kopkind . . . liberal values and norms are treated with something very close to contempt.

Howe was not the only former contributor to express alarm. The sociologist Dennis Wrong, who had appeared in *The New York Review*'s inaugural issue, wrote a lengthy and thoughtful piece on the journal for the November 1970 issue of *Commentary*. Noting, with basic approval, *The New York Review*'s early campaign against the Vietnam war, Wrong pointed out that

> by 1966 and 1967 a new tone of extravagant, querulous, self-righteous anti-Americanism began to creep into the *NYR*'s reports on Vietnam, especially those of Noam Chomsky, Mary McCarthy, and I. F. Stone. The war seemed increasingly to provide the occasion for an extreme and bitter repudiation, marked by an unmistakable touch of *Schadenfreude*, of a great deal more in American life than the Johnson administration's foreign policy, the Pentagon, the military-industrial complex, and the wretched clichés of cold-war propaganda.

The May 1971 *Esquire* went even further, predicting in a press note that "from among [*The New York Review*'s] authors the next Stalin, and his speechwriters, will emerge." In Philip Nobile's phrase, what began as "a literary proposition . . . infused with liberal politics" had become a "politicized platform of the radical Left."

As Dennis Wrong suggested, although the Vietnam War occasioned much of *The New York Review*'s radicalism, the real target was not America's policy about Vietnam but America itself. Indeed, anti-Americanism—a prominent feature in almost all countercultural rhetoric—became a major leitmotif, almost a unifying theme, in *The New York Review*. For example, Mary McCarthy traveled to Vietnam early in 1967 for *The New York Review*; she began the first installment

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of her report—the cover story for April 20—with this acknowledgement: "I confess that when I went to Vietnam early in February I was looking for material damaging to the American interest and that I found it, though often by accident or in the process of being briefed by an official." In the course of her reports, McCarthy naturally places the phrase "Free World" in scare quotes and consistently portrays Americans as venal monstrosities (when she converses with a CIA agent, his "lips flexed as he spoke like rubber bands"). Glorifying the industry and pluck of the North Vietnamese, she tells her readers that the "sense of fair play" "has atrophied in the Americans here from lack of exercise."

At the beginning of her second installment, McCarthy famously declared that "the worst thing that could happen to our country would be to win this war." Years later, in 1979, after the horrific spectacle of the Vietnamese boat people and similar phenomena consequent on America's losing that war, she was asked if she had changed her views on Vietnam. Noting that her ideal was still "socialism with a human face" (one might as well wish for a wooden iron), she nevertheless acknowledged that "as for my current views on Vietnam, it's all rather daunting. I've several times contemplated writing a letter to [the Vietnamese premier] Pham Van Dong (I get a Christmas card from him every year) asking him can't you stop this, how is it possible for men like you to permit what's going on? . . . I've never written that letter, though."

The combination of arrogance and naïveté implicit in McCarthy's retrospective musings about Vietnam was a staple of *The New York Review*'s anti-Americanism. Jason Epstein provided a truly vertiginous example in an essay called "The CIA and the Intellectuals" (April 20, 1967). Following up on the revelation that the CIA had provided covert funding to some student and cultural organizations (including, most famously, *Encounter* magazine in England), Epstein's piece was a meditation on how "organized anti-Communism had become as much an industry within New York's intellectual life as Communism itself had been a decade or so earlier." Among other things, "The CIA and the Intellectuals" was an early masterpiece of what came to be called "moral equivalence." In one remarkable passage, Epstein writes that Stalin

> not only purged and tortured his former comrades, killed millions of Russians, signed the pact with Hitler, and suppressed the writers and artists. He had also done something which directly affected their own lives, much as the CIA and the State Department have not only burned the crops and villages and peoples of Vietnam, but have also brought so much anguish into the lives of so many young people today. What Stalin did to the generation of intellectuals who came of age between the Thirties and Fifties was to betray the idealism and innocence of their youth. By perverting revolutionary Marxism, he cheated them, as it were, in their very souls.

Where to begin? Epstein concludes sadly that certain radical intellectuals, robbed of their Communist ideals by nasty Joe Stalin, devoted "the rest of their energies to retribution." Hence, you see, the birth of Neoconservatism. It's not simply that Epstein transforms a principled rejection of Communism into a psychological tic; he also insinuates an equivalence between the murderous behavior of Stalin and the activities of the American CIA. What Epstein does not see is that his friends who turned against Communism did so not because Stalin perverted "revolutionary Marxism" but because they finally understood that Stalinism was the natural fulfillment of revolutionary Marxism.

Epstein's essay is notable for its exhibition of the way liberal disillusionment can be elevated into a kind of metaphysics of anti-Americanism:

> The facts are clearer now than they were ten years ago. Then it surprised us to find that the country seemed to have fallen into a frenzy of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> self-destruction, tearing its cities apart, fouling its landscapes, poisoning the streams and skies, trivializing the education of its children, and not for any substantial human happiness, . . . but for higher profits and rapidly increased economic growth. . . . What we were experiencing was the familiar philistine expansionism (of which the Vietnamese are only the latest victims), this time attached to a formidable technology whose alarming possibilities were as yet unclear, but which was even then depressingly out of human scale and growing larger and more autonomous every day.

Now at last, Epstein concludes, it is clear that "pursuit of money and power became openly America's main, if not its only, business." Again, where to begin? And which is worse, Epstein's moralism, or his hypocrisy? By psychologizing politics and attempting to replace basic political commitments with a melodrama of virtue, Epstein is really engaged in a species of moral blackmail. As Diana Trilling observed in a withering response to "The CIA and the Intellectuals," Epstein would have us believe that "depending on how we respond to the poisoning of our streams and skies we will take either a Left- or a Right-Wing position on —say—the Vietnam War. Whoever abhors polluted air and desecrated landscapes will have adequate grounds on which to judge American foreign policy. He will recognize it in all its 'philistine expansionism.' What further guide to decision in foreign affairs does anyone need?"

In the end, *The New York Review*'s anti-Americanism has to be seen as part of a larger project of political, intellectual, and moral delegitimation. For example, over the years, the *Review* has run some distinguished pieces on science. But its has also been prey to a kind of countercultural technophobia that borders on irrationalism. Consider, for example, John McDermott's "Technology: The Opiate of the Intellectuals," which appeared in July 1969. The amazing conclusion of this long and tedious piece is that the spirit of scientific curiosity and promotion of technology

> should be frankly recognized as a conservative or right-wing ideology. . . . it succeeds in identifying and rationalizing the interests of the most authoritarian elites within this country, and the expansionism of their policies overseas. Truly it is no accident that the leading figures of *laissez innover* . . . are among the most unreconstructed cold warriors in American intellectual life.

Truly, it is no accident, either, that this sort of politicized attack on science and technology became a prominent item on the menu of academic radicalism.

Although Jerry Rubin—former Yippie and author of the once-influential *Do It!*—made only one appearance in *The New York Review*, his "Emergency Letter to My Brothers and Sisters in the Movement" (February 1969), written while he was in custody, is nonetheless significant as a reminder of the kinds of views Silvers and his colleagues were willing to countenance in its pages. Rubin begins by boasting that, although the forces of repression are on the rise, "We are stealing the youth of America right out of the kindergartens and elementary schools." After some remarks about how "America's courts are colonial courts," her jails "black concentration camps," he goes on to declare that "smoking pot is a political act, and every smoker is an outlaw. The drug culture is a revolutionary threat to plasticwasp9–5america [*sic*]."

> Who the hell wants to "make it" in America anymore? The hippie-yippie-SDS movement is a "white nigger" movement. The American economy no longer needs young whites and blacks. We are waste material. We fulfill our destiny in life by rejecting a system which rejects us.

Accordingly, Rubin calls for widespread demonstrations near jails and court houses to "demand immediate freedom for Huey P. Newton, Eldridge Cleaver, Rap Brown, all

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

black prisoners, Timothy Leary, the Oakland Seven, all drug prisoners, all draft resisters, Benjamin Spock, ... me," etc. Of course, Rubin was always something of a buffoon. And his conversion from Yippie freak to Wall Street investment counselor makes his adolescent antics seem even more puerile than they perhaps were. Today, it is tempting to look back on erstwhile countercultural heroes like Jerry Rubin as comic figures, more preposterous than menacing. But it is a great mistake to believe that the preposterous is the enemy of the malign. On the contrary, such qualities often feed upon and abet each other.

In any event, if Rubin's appearance in *The New York Review* was something of an aberration, the same cannot be said about Andrew Kopkind's many appearances in its pages. Perhaps his most notorious contribution was "Soul Power," which appeared as the lead essay in the infamous Molotov cocktail issue of August 24, 1967. Ostensibly a review of Martin Luther King's *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*, it was really a guerrilla manifesto. Arguing that America was "a society infused with racism," Kopkind declared that King's policy of nonviolence was obsolete and that King himself (whom he described as "shuffling between Chicago and Cleveland") was now "an irrelevancy." In an oft-repeated and oft-castigated phrase, Kopkind announced that "morality, like politics, starts at the barrel of a gun." (The echo of *Der Stürmer*—"When I hear the word 'culture,' I reach for my gun" —was not lost on the *Review*'s critics.) Even more troubling than Kopkind's thuggishness was his embrace of revolutionary anarchy. It is worth quoting the opening of his exhortation at length (note the allusions to *A Tale of Two Cities*, one of the most sentimentalizing portraits of the French Revolution extant):

> The Movement is dead; the Revolution is unborn. The streets are bloody and ablaze, but it is difficult to see why, and impossible to know for what end. Government on every level is ineffectual, helpless to act either in the short term or the long. The force of Army and police seems not to suppress violence, but incite it. . . . It is the worst of times.
>
> It is the best of times. The wretched of this American earth are together as they have never been before, . . . No march, no sit-in, no boycott ever touched so many. . . . The subtle methods of co-optation work no better to keep it intact than the brutal methods of repression; if it is any comfort, liberalism proves hardly more effective than fascism. Above all, there is a sense that the continuity of an age has been cut, that we have arrived at an infrequent fulcrum of history, and that what comes now will be vastly different from what went before.
>
> It is not a time for reflection, but for evocation. The responsibility of the intellectual is the same as that of the street organizer, the draft resister, the Digger: to talk *to* people, not *about* them. The important literature now is the underground press, the speeches of Malcolm, the works of Fanon, the songs of the Rolling Stones and Aretha Franklin.

"Liberalism proves hardly more effective than fascism"; "it is not a time for reflection, but for evocation"; the works of Frantz Fanon and Malcolm X, the pseudo-Dionysiac drivel of the Rolling Stones: by publishing this screed, *The New York Review* made itself party to the sanctimonious, anti-cultural nihilism preached by the worst elements of Sixties radicalism.

It did nothing to redeem itself with Tom Hayden's long report on the 1967 Newark riots later in the same issue. This future California assemblyman reported on the looting, arson, shooting, and mayhem that swept over the city with a mixture of glee and revolutionary amoralism. He clearly loved every minute of it. The riots were sparked by an incident of police brutality against a black taxicab driver; over the next couple of days, tensions mounted inexorably: "regardless of what the Mayor did, regardless of what civil-rights leaders did, regardless of what planners of the demonstration did, the riot was going to happen. The authorities had been indifferent to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the community's demand for justice; now the community was going to be indifferent to the authorities' demand for order." Once the riots got underway, Hayden provided a steady stream of equivocating patter: the looting was "spirited"; "many missiles were thrown at cars driven by whites but not often with murderous intent"; whites were stopped and intimidated, but "very few, if any, were shot at."

> People voted with their feet to expropriate property to which they felt entitled. . . . A common claim was: this is owed me. But few needed to argue. People who under ordinary conditions respected law because they were forced to do so now felt free to act upon the law as they thought it should be.

Moreover, Hayden said, "most of the people were taking only for themselves. One reason there was so little quarreling over 'who gets what' was that there was, for a change, enough for all." Besides, "most of the rage" was directed at white store owners, not at "schools, churches, or banks," which —Hayden assures us in one extraordinary aside—are "oppressive" but "contain little that can be carried off." Clearly, Silvers and his colleagues were pleased by Hayden's endorsement of violence and illegality, for they allowed it to be used in an advertising campaign for *The New York Review* that fall: "If you want to bring a Molotov cocktail to your next cocktail party, arm yourself with Tom Hayden's 'The Occupation of Newark,' in which the Establishment's version of what went on there is blown to bits."

Philip Nobile believed that *The New York Review*'s flirtation with the radical Left was brief, aberrant, and basically harmless. In fact the journal's sudden jerk leftward revealed something essential not only about its politics but also about its attitude toward ideas and the life of the mind. In brief, *The New York Review* was a journal of blithe political opportunism, ready at the first hint of a change in the public mood to embrace extreme, even revolutionary, ideas that were totally at odds with its ambition to be (as the editors declared in their first issue) "a responsible literary journal." In "Radical Chic," his brilliant 1970 dissection of high-end radical posturing, Tom Wolfe mentions the *New York Review*'s Molotov cocktail issue. The journal, he notes,

> was sometimes referred to good-naturedly as *The Parlour Panther*, with the *-our* spelling of *Parlour* being an allusion to its concurrent motif of anglophilia. The *Review*'s embracing of such apparently contradictory attitudes—the nitty-gritty of the ghetto warriors and the preciosity of traditional Leavis & Empson intellectualism—was really no contradiction at all, of course. It was merely the essential double-track mentality of Radical Chic—*nostalgie de la boue* and high protocol—in its literary form.

One possible synonym for what Wolfe describes as the "double-track mentality of Radical Chic" is "hypocrisy." Another is "unprincipled opportunism." It has often been pointed out that there was plenty about the Sixties counterculture that *The New York Review* did not endorse—the fatuousness of Pop Art, for example, or the intellectual swamp of deconstruction. This is true enough. But it is hardly exculpatory. *The New York Review*'s mandarin posture has naturally made it wary of much that is meretricious. What matters, though, has been its willingness to let radical politics trump its commitment to high culture. Quite apart from the irresponsibility of the politics, there was an *intellectual* irresponsibility at work here, a preening, ineradicable frivolousness toward the cultural values that the journal was supposedly created to nurture. That is why, as one looks back over the course of the *The New York Review*, it seems less an intellectual than a sociological phenomenon: not so much a distinguished literary review as, in Tom Wolfe's perfect phrase, "the chief theoretical organ of Radical Chic." More than any other journal, *The New York Review of Books* made America's cultural revolution seem like an intellectually respectable enterprize.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Paul Johnson's America

by Hadley Arkes

Henry James describes, in one of his short stories, a writer of unabated success, and remarks that "it was not given her not to please." In the case of the English historian Paul Johnson, it is not given him to write dull or opaque sentences, even on some rather abstruse and complicated subjects that do not figure to command a popular audience. For many good, imperishable reasons, we are not apt to see a musical version of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. And yet, one has the sense that, if Paul Johnson tried his hand at a work expounding Kant, he would somehow make a bestseller of it. He is not himself a biblical scholar, and yet he wrote a *History of the Jews* that could be read, with profit and satisfaction, by people who were well-tutored in the arcana of Jewish theology. One friend, learned in these matters, was quite astonished at the range of writings that Johnson managed to cover—and to explain in readable prose.

That astonishment may be warranted, in only a slightly modulated form, by his most recent offering, *A History of the American People*.[1] For this work, too, must be counted as magisterial: it is not an array of "impressions," offered up by a frequent, urbane visitor; it is a sweeping history, which begins with the Portuguese and Spanish explorations of the New World, and culminates with the age of Clinton, Whitewater, affirmative action, and "political correctness." It contains, then, not only broad brush strokes, but portraits of figures rendered quite precisely. Johnson also brings to this project the tastes of a man anchored in the world, among them a taste for facts, even more precise, on the structure of things: on the way buildings were built, on the number of railroads, on the manner in which people made their livings. But he would also encompass those motives that run beyond the prosaic ways of making a living and point to the ends of human life. There can be no accounting for America without an appreciation of these religious understandings that animated the early Americans, or of the principles of politics that framed the American "regime" and that impart to its national life another level of moral significance.

Johnson's history of America is offered by a British friend of this country who is seasoned in the ways of the world and of statesmen, a writer matured now in years, and in his sense of how to gauge persons and events. He was evidently moved to this project out of a sense that there was clearly wanting a basic historical account of America—knowledge which is apparently missing from the education of ordinary people, not only in Europe but in America as well. My own former student David Eisenhower has devoted himself to explaining the understandings that shaped the career of his grandfather in the military and

1 *A History of the American People*, by Paul Johnson; HarperCollins, 1,088 pages, $35.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in politics, and he remarked a while ago on some recent signs that World War II has now slipped into "history." His wife, born Julie Nixon, was driving to a board meeting, and, after turning off the turnpike in Pennsylvania, she checked into a motel. The eighteen-year-old girl behind the counter seemed to have uncommon trouble spelling Julie's married name. But then recognition broke in from another angle: "It's the same name as that boulevard down there."

Johnson seems moved, too, by the awareness of a lack that runs beyond a need for basic information. There is a sense in which the "history" of the country has been filtered in a tendentious way and hijacked by people in the academy. In their hands, history has been converted into a series of fables that fit the temper and the agenda of the Left. In our own day, students are more likely to learn that the American founding was corrupted: that the founders were hypocrites who postured over "natural rights" while they accommodated slavery and denied the vote to women. In this construction, the unfolding of American history leads, on its best plane, to the age of "multiculturalism" and to new, liberal entitlements based on race and gender.

Against this trend, Johnson leans decisively in the other direction: in the face of writers who doubt that there are stable truths or facts, he would fill in facts, he would tell the story accurately. But he would also tell it with a sensibility quite removed from the ethic of political correctness in our own time. And so the reader is persistently apt to encounter items quite unlikely to be found in the texts written these days by academics. For example, it is not commonly known that Franklin Roosevelt, when he was assistant secretary of the Navy, approved a project of entrapment, directed at homosexuals, for the purpose of breaking up a circle of homosexuals at the naval enclave in Newport, Rhode Island. When he was confronted, at an official inquiry, FDR lied. His performance was later exposed and condemned by a committee in the Senate as "immoral" and "an abuse of the authority of his high office." Nor is it widely known that FDR had directed the Internal Revenue Service in a campaign to persecute Andrew Mellon, and FDR later intervened, in 1944, to protect his devoted protégé, Congressman Lyndon Johnson, from being prosecuted for tax fraud.

There was apparently ample evidence for Lyndon Johnson's involvement in the capers that sent his aide Bobby Baker to jail for seventeen months. LBJ was protected from investigation by a phalanx of senators that included Sam Ervin and Daniel Inouye; and, of course, Ervin would gain lasting fame for striking high moral stances and driving Richard Nixon out of office.

In fact, according to Johnson, Nixon should have been seen as a "hero" in American politics, and Kennedy as the "anti-hero." Nixon had sprung from a poor family, with no advantages; he had attended a second-rate college, and made his way in politics through his own discipline and effort. Kennedy had become the affable beneficiary of his father's fraud from an early date, beginning with the hiring of ghost writers to write his senior thesis at Harvard. The full stories of his misadventures, with the landing at the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban missile crisis, are yet to be written, and they become more and more discreditable with each unfolding. Paul Johnson does not bother to shade things with the moral equivocation of the academics, and so he draws out quite sharply the estimate of Kennedy as amoral, feckless, stunningly unserious.

The same angle on the world leads him to judgments quite as discordant with the reigning orthodoxies as they bear on some of the men ranked as chief villains in the nineteenth century. Johnson is disposed, on the whole, to take a rather benign view of those buccaneers in business who have been stamped as "robber barons." Men such as Vanderbilt, Carnegie, and Harriman left school in their teens and made their ascent not by energy alone but through sound judgment and no small measure of genius.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Carnegie had the wit to see that the promise of capitalism was to make luxuries into necessities. He grasped the notion of measuring unit costs of production for the sake of lowering them, and in lowering them he managed to reduce the cost of items that could be dispersed to a wider public, thereby vastly raising the standard of living. By producing steel more cheaply, he could make it profitable to put up the new skyscrapers, or to lower the expense of shipping by rail, which, in turn, lowered the price of everything shipped by rail. Harriman would never be held back in his maneuvers by any notions of propriety that were overly strenuous. Still, there is no gainsaying the level of his achievement in putting together the Union Pacific railroad. These men enriched themselves in the style of capitalism by producing, in their exertions, the most palpable material benefits for the country.

In Johnson's reckoning, these men contributed far more to the welfare of the nation than most of the men who occupied the presidency in the balance of the nineteenth century after Lincoln. Many businessmen, such as J. P. Morgan and Andrew Mellon, extended their gifts to the country by establishing new museums of art based on their own collections. That is to say, they gave the public the added benefit of collections assembled with a more exacting taste—far better than the collections that were likely to have been arranged by any equivalent, at the time, of the National Endowment for the Arts.

It is in the commentary on our own age that Johnson's account acquires its distinct edge, for it is sharpened there by his own acquaintance with the leading political men in America and Britain. A reader may encounter some unfamiliar and arresting lines struck off by Harold Macmillan or Richard Nixon, for example, and find in the notes that they were conveyed in letters addressed to Johnson himself. Hence, Nixon on Eisenhower: he was "the most devious man I ever came across in politics. . . . he always applied two, three or four lines of reasoning to a single problem, and he usually preferred the indirect approach." Or far better, Harold Macmillan, asked for his impressions of Washington under the Kennedys: "Oh, it's rather like watching the Borgia brothers take over a respectable North Italian city."

This proximity to political men seems to have given Johnson a certain sobriety in forming his own estimates. Even his friends are subject to a certain discounting; he is not taken in by the hyperbole that grips the admirers who have viewed these political men from afar. That no doubt accounts for his slight deflating of Ronald Reagan. Of course, he credits Reagan with a certain common sense; a state of being anchored, or "centered," in the world; and with seeing things as they are. But Johnson has a vivid sense of Reagan's gaffes, his occasional misspeaking, and he is inclined to regard Reagan as "sometimes confused in his thinking."

The defining merit, or virtue, of Reagan he finds in "a consistent and coherent style, that of light comedy." With that touch of art, he could harmonize all of his functions, high and low, in a lilting way. But the executive, seen by others, the man with a photographic recall of memos, did not seem to come within Johnson's sight. Nor did he witness, in action, the chief who could deftly fend off attempts to deflect him from his agenda, or the man who would impart to his aides a certain backbone. Perhaps, in seeing Reagan up close, Johnson did not see the presence of a "design" in his actions that became evident to others after a while.

But Johnson does know that there are different levels of intelligence. Hillary Clinton mastered the intricate set of rules that described that work of rare genius, the health plan she devised with the help of Ira Magaziner. Ronald Reagan would have listened for a minute and a half and recognized that the plan made no contact with the world that the rest of us inhabited. That is a different kind of intelligence or worldli-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ness, and with that sense of things he could grasp some primary truths of this kind: in the scheme of arms control, the advantage would lie with a totalitarian regime, which could keep a closer rein on information and suffer few inhibitions about the breaking of laws. But with a high-tech arms race for "strategic defense," with lasers countering missiles, the advantage would lie with a country that fostered inventiveness and quick technical breakthroughs. Reagan came down decisively for the Strategic Defense Initiative (though he never moved seriously to build the system), and, as Johnson recognizes, it was SDI that finally cracked the Soviet system. In a desperate attempt to cope, the Soviet leaders sought to reform their economy, and "in the process they lost control of the system as a whole, saw the Evil Empire disintegrate." Vladimir Lukhim, who later became the Russian ambassador to the United States, admitted in 1992 "that SDI accelerated our catastrophe by at least five years."

None of this came as a surprise to Reagan, any more than the discovery that he could put the Russians under considerable strain through the simple expedient of supplying shoulder-held missiles to the resistance in Afghanistan. As Johnson recognizes, Reagan managed to undermine the self-confidence of those men who ruled the Soviet Union. He did it in part by raising the costs for them, but even more thoroughly by conveying his contempt, his deep lack of respect, for the moral character of their regime and what he called their "Mickey Mouse economy." The same discrete moves managed also to restore the confidence of the American people, for it became clear, even to the dimmest characters in the academy, that the United States still had ample levers for making things happen in the world. That simple demonstration exposed the emptiness of those high-flown theories—much favored by the Carter administration—on why the United States could not expect to control the currents at work in the rest of the world. Johnson is nowhere more cutting than in his estimate of that crowd and its furnishings of mind:

> Cyrus Vance [the secretary of state] thought that to "oppose Soviet or Cuban involvement in Africa would be futile." "The fact is," he added, "that we can no more stop change than Canute could still the waters." . . . Feeling impotent, the Carter administration took refuge in cloudy metaphor, for which [Zbigniew] Brzezinski had a talent. . . . "There are many different axes of conflict in the world," he noted, "[and] the more they intersect, the more dangerous they become." West Asia was "the arc of crisis." But "the need is not for acrobatics but for architecture."

Dressed in academic language, this sounds like a knock-off of the late Al Kelly, announcing gravely that "the forsyt is connected to the franadort." But in Johnson's estimate, this is also what George Bush tended to sound like when he left the tethers of a text and sought to expound his thoughts in free form. An endnote records that "the author first drew Bush's attention to this weakness in 1984, when he promised to remedy it by sticking to prepared texts, but did not do so."

Johnson rarely slips into such self-inflating, but, in this relative diminishing of Bush, it might have thrown off Johnson's judgment a shade, as in the case of Reagan. Johnson faults Bush with a lack of thoroughness and follow-through as shown notably, he thinks, in Panama and in the Gulf War. Apparently lost here are the thoroughness of Bush's diplomacy as he steered through the unification of Germany, and the deftness with which he put together the coalition that fought the war in the Gulf. The evident inability of his successor to reassemble that coalition may demonstrate again that this achievement was the product of art rather than nature. Part of Bush's art was in its own concealment, but it is curious that Johnson, quite attentive to the ways of statesmen, should have missed it, fastening instead on Bush's fumbling with texts. Still, I am inclined to think that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Johnson largely has it right: Bush was elected because he promised a continuation of the Reagan administration, and the attachment of the people withered as it became clear—and as Bush himself oddly wished to make it clear—that he was not Ronald Reagan.

Johnson has the merits that Plato identified with the man of "right opinion": he may not always be able to give an account of the deep principles, or the governing reasons, but he has the right sense of things, and he is able to find his way when the landmarks are down. With the statesmen of his acquaintance, however, he courts the slight mistakes that arise from knowing his subjects too closely. And with the statesmen more distant in time, and especially with the generation of the founders, he runs the risk of not lingering long enough on the understandings that shaped their minds and supplied the grounds for their judgments. He knows men like John Marshall and Alexander Hamilton mainly through the popular biographies. But those biographies were written for the most part by writers who no longer took seriously the principles of natural right that genuinely influenced Hamilton and Marshall. To give an account of those men, detached from those principles of understanding, is to put the accent on their tempers and characters and on the immediate objects of their policies. But it is to miss the way in which these men understood themselves, the jurisprudence they established, and the regime they built.

Johnson knows John Marshall as a "nationalist" who favored the expansion of a capitalist economy. But even as a dedicated amateur he may not know Marshall through his writings, through those carefully crafted opinions that provide the legacy of his teaching on the Supreme Court. In one notable case, *Fletcher v. Peck* (1810), Marshall and his colleagues struck down a move by the legislature of Georgia to revoke a grant of lands. The court could have settled the matter simply by invoking the Contracts Clause of the Constitution and found that the legislature had "impair[ed] the Obligations of Contract." Instead, Marshall did something far more elegant: he showed that the Contracts Clause could be drawn *deductively* from a deeper principle of jurisprudence, the principle that barred "ex post facto laws" (laws that imposed or deepened penalties "after the fact").

That principle was understood as necessary to any regime of law. And so Marshall could draw his conclusion in this way: Georgia was "part of a large empire; she is a member of the American union," but the act of the legislature was so deeply wrong that it would still be wrong even "were Georgia a single sovereign power"—even, that is, if Georgia were outside the Constitution, and outside the coverage of the Contracts Clause. With this remarkable move, Marshall managed to teach a powerful lesson: the provisions of the Constitution, or the basic law, have the claim to stand as basic law because they are grounded in propositions that do not depend for their validity on their mention in the Constitution.

To be drawn back in that way to the principles of law was to be drawn back to the principles of natural right, which stood, as truths, even before the Constitution. Johnson recognizes the language of natural rights, and he attaches a real significance to the claims of "natural justice." But he tends also to put it aside, as though it were not really central to the story he was telling. Yet Lincoln forced the famous debates with Stephen Douglas, and brought us to the crisis of the "house divided," where the center of the argument was precisely the meaning of the Declaration of Independence and the logic of "natural rights." For Lincoln, the Republic did not begin with the Constitution, but with the articulation of that "proposition," as he called it, which was the "father of all principles" among us: that "all men are created equal." In denying the truth of that proposition, Douglas had to fall into the grooves of what we could call today cultural relativism. He had to insist that there were no truths grounded in the "na-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ture" of human beings, truths that became the source then of distinctly "human" rights in all places where human nature remained the same.

But Johnson treats the Declaration more for its stylistic qualities than for its substance. He does not, then, prepare the ground for Lincoln's argument with Douglas, and, continuing in this way, he passes by the core of Lincoln's statesmanship. He also misses the depth and range of Lincoln's genius in expounding the principles of the American regime. It is curious and revealing, in this respect, that in his copious reading on Lincoln, he seems not to have encountered Harry Jaffa's *Crisis of the House Divided* (1973). That work must be counted as the best book on Lincoln because it treats Lincoln at the highest level of his being and his work, in his moral and political teaching. As Jaffa shows, Lincoln, untutored, managed on his own to retrace the paths of argument taken by Aristotle and Aquinas. Jaffa's book on Lincoln is a rare work, which combines a historical account with the exposition of a philosophic teaching. Jaffa's paramount concern is with that philosophic understanding, and a book so ordered can be seen as a work in political philosophy. A book directed to a wider audience, such as Johnson's, forces the writer to adopt the discipline of the political man addressing the multitude, which will not be composed mainly of philosophers. As Lincoln understood, the task of the political man at that moment is to impart "the central idea." And that is what Johnson has handsomely done in this book; he is the man of "right opinion" telling the story.

The "central idea" of America pervades Johnson's pages. He makes it evident to his readers that he sees that idea as the driving force behind, for example, the Homestead Acts in the 1860s: the government sold land in vast amounts, on the principles of a free market, to preserve a free market in land, and that arrangement helped to produce in record time a vast settlement of owners. "Never in human history, before or since," writes Johnson, "has authority gone to such lengths to help the common people to become landowners."

Even the advent of modern marketing and mass production is touched, for him, with this spirit. The Sears catalogue managed to push down prices on things like sewing machines; it became a force then in making luxuries affordable and improving the standard of living for a broad public. The same animating principle is seen, by Johnson, in the accomplishment of Henry Ford: 5,986 Ford automobiles sold in 1908 at a price of $850; 577,036 cars sold in 1916 at $360. Years later, in the Second World War, the Battle of Midway was won, in part, because the carrier *Yorktown* was restored to the American fleet. But it was restored only because a regimen of repairs, estimated to take three months, was carried out in forty-eight hours by twelve hundred technicians working continuously. Johnson, with his knowledge of the world, recognizes that this was the kind of exercise likely to be produced, at the time, only in America. There was a clear connection between that extraordinary effort and the prodigies of production that would be orchestrated in wartime by Henry J. Kaiser. These feats cannot be detached from the "ethic" of America, or from the kinds of institutions that permitted such inventiveness and energy to flourish.

Johnson does not exactly hit his readers over the head with the point, but he does manage to convey the sense that the motivating force here, through these episodes, bore a distinct "moral" character. And as he nears the end of his account, he puts the accent on the most recent trends that mark the "demoralizing" of America: the rise of violent crime, the decline of academic standards, the turning away from marriage as the framework for the commitment of partners and the begetting of children. By 1991, as he notes, 68 percent of all births for blacks were illegitimate.

But with an uncommon turn, Johnson extends his concern here to take in the expanding powers of the courts. As the judges

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have come to rule the country on matters of moral consequence, they have gravely diminished that part of our public life in which citizens deliberate with one another on the terms of principle by which we are governed. On the matters of abortion, pornography, and homosexuality, the judges have managed to impose laws quite at odds with the moral sentiments of the American people. In the case of abortion, the judges have produced a culture of abortion that has resulted in the taking of more than thirty-five million lives since the decision in *Roe v. Wade*. The "success" of the judges may be measured in these melancholy findings: that about 60 percent of the public is opposed to about 90 percent of the abortions now permitted under the laws, but they are not inclined to object or to disturb the law created by the judges. For they have apparently absorbed the notion that matters of moral consequence should no longer come within the reach of the law or of politicians.

Johnson has no trace of doubt that America finds itself in a moral crisis, and that this kind of crisis has been overcome in the past mainly through a resurgence of religion. He finds it, then, a perverse turn in our current politics that the courts have been moving strongly in the other direction and purging religion from our public life. In Europe, the intellectuals have long seen religion as a barrier to progress or liberation. And yet, Tocqueville recorded that among the Americans religion was "indispensable to the maintenance of free institutions." Intellectuals in America now pride themselves on taking a view of this matter more in keeping with cosmopolitans abroad. And in falling into that groove of fashion, they seem blissfully unaware of losing the understanding described by Tocqueville. This witlessness of the courts and of the intellectuals has been marked in the public discourse by shifts in our language. As Johnson observes:

> The usual, normal, habitual, and customary moral beliefs of Christians and Jews were first verbally isolated as "traditionalist," then as "orthodox," next as "ultra-orthodox," and finally as fundamentalist (with "obscurantist" added for full measure) though they remained the same beliefs all the time. It was not the beliefs which had altered but the way in which they were regarded by non-believers or anti-believers, not so much by those who did not share them as by those who objected to them.

Still, Johnson strikes, at the end, a note of hopefulness, for it is only decorous to hold out at least the possibility of a happy ending. He is convinced that the "American republican experiment" remains "the first, best hope for the human race," and "the auguries are that it will not disappoint an expectant humanity." But his upbeat finish is belied by the account he has sketched in so precisely. For what he has described is a people utterly persuaded that they are the bearers of vast, new bodies of "rights," but they are not quite capable any longer of giving an account of the moral premises on which those rights are founded. People speak commonly of the "sanctity" of human life, but they can no longer explain why any of us has a "nature" with an intrinsic moral significance—or even a touch of the sacred—that anyone else should be obliged to respect.

And yet, that sense of "sanctity" and "rights" will not be dislodged from our vocabulary because it is rooted, as it used to be said, in "the constitution of our natures." It is simply in the nature of human beings to speak of right and wrong, and to experience outrage. Kant had it right when he suggested that we carry a metaphysic within ourselves, as did Plato when he suggested that it was a matter mainly of unlocking what is already within us. The central idea of America will not be dissolved, then, even in this age of postmodernism. But whether we continue on the path of vulgarity and moral coarseness will depend on whether we can summon the wit to unlock what is within us, and whether we can remember then, as a people, the things we used to know.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Monsieur Proust's masterwork

by Joseph Epstein

What do we come away with when we read not merely a masterpiece but a masterwork of literature? The distinction between the two, masterpiece and masterwork, I take to be in favor of the latter, for a masterwork is not necessarily perfect of its kind, as a masterpiece ought to be, but of a significance beyond the question of mere (some "mere") perfection. Usually large, often sprawling, always the product of monstrous ambition, a masterwork is a key book, one that defines a historical era, or the culmination of a form, or a national literature, or Western thought itself. Robert Musil, in *The Man Without Qualities*, set out to produce a masterwork, but, despite his great brilliance, failed. Nothing short of genius is required to bring it off. The *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid*, *The Divine Comedy*—such are masterworks. Closer to our own time, books that qualify as masterworks, I should say, include *War and Peace*, *Ulysses*, and *Remembrance of Things Past*.

One of the qualities that mark a masterwork is the inability of readers ever to feel that they have quite grasped it, or at any rate grasped it in its entirety, its wholeness. Almost all masterworks fit into that select category of works that probably shouldn't be read for the first time; they are works, in other words, that call for being not merely read but reread, two, three, maybe more times, for even the most percipient reader cannot hope to comprehend all that is going on in their pages. Such is their richness that they may yield up quite different and possibly equally persuasive interpretations at various ages in the same reader's life.

The modern masterwork at its most characteristic, in some ways the masterwork of all masterworks, is Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. Yet of the great works of modern literature, it is the one that offers the most obstacles. The first of course is its bulk, its length: more than a million words, 3,365 pages in the Terence Kilmartin reworking of the C. Scott Moncrieff translation. Much depends on the edition in which one attempts to read Proust. The C. Scott Moncrieff translation, which came in a boxed two-volume Random House edition, had wretched leading; the very want of space between lines makes dragging one's eyes across the page a physical difficulty in itself. The language in Moncrieff, too, has sometimes been thought too lush, the editing that is necessarily a part of the act of translation too lenient. Not that one wishes in any way to undervalue Moncrieff's achievement, which is immense.

Like any serious *proustolâtre* (as fanatics for Proust are called), I own both the C. Scott Moncrieff and the Terence Kilmartin editions; and I own, too, the Pléiade edition of *A la recherche du temps perdu*. Attempting to read Proust in French fairly quickly put paid to my pathetic pretensions as a reader of French. Proust presents difficulties enough in English. His long, loop-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing sentences, interrupted by parentheses frequently more interesting than the sentences in which they are embedded, frequently held together by shaky syntax, often require rereading. A stockpile of such sentences in a paragraph that itself runs four or five pages is not exactly what might be called, in the current cant phrase, reader friendly.

Lest one think oneself low on the learning curve for finding Proust difficult, one's spirits—and self-esteem—might revive slightly by the discovery that E. M. Forster found Proust no piece of (madeleine) cake. "I was hoping to find Proust easier in English than in French," Forster wrote,

> and do not. All the difficulties of the original are here faithfully reproduced. A sentence begins quite simply, then it undulates and expands, parentheses intervene like quick-set hedges, the flowers of comparison bloom, and three fields off, like a wounded partridge, crouches the principal verb, making one wonder as one picks it up, poor little thing, whether after all it was worth such a tramp, so many guns, such expensive dogs, and what, after all, is its relation to the main subject, potted so gaily half a page back, and proving finally to have been in the accusative case.

Much of this is owing to Proust's method of composition. Extravagance, in prose as in life, was not something he worried much about. Céleste Alberet, his housekeeper and friend of his last years, tells that Proust, whose skin, like so much else about him, was very sensitive, used to require several towels to dry his face. "He dabbed himself with each towel once, either to wash or to dry himself, and then threw it aside," thence to be sent to Lavigne, an expensive Paris laundry. With his towels, so with his prose: Proust was lavish in the extreme, rarely cutting, endlessly adding to his already vast manuscript. No believer in the modern dictum that less is more, he believed, au contraire, that more was plainly more and hence better, and he seems never to have had any trouble in finding more to add by way of new subordinate clauses, additional parentheses, and fresh codas to already vastly labyrinthine sentences.

This method, if method it was, can give Proust's prose a density and a difficulty that puts some readers off, but it also gives that same prose a richness and complexity that turns quite as many readers on. ("These, however, are the disciplines of Proust," Forster wrote, after the passage I quoted above. "No earnest sportsman would forego them.") The love of complexity in literature is an acquired taste. Joseph Conrad had it. And Henry James had it in excelsis, once saying that if he could make the pronunciation of his name more complicated he would not hesitate to do so. The complexity of Proust is an acquired taste, but, once acquired, it becomes an abiding love.

I have read *Remembrance of Things Past* two and one-seventh times. The first, or one-seventh, time was as an undergraduate at the University of Chicago, where *Swann's Way*, the first volume of *Remembrance of Things Past*, came near the end of one of those mad-hatter survey courses in the novel that young teachers put together, beginning with *The Princess of Clèves* and running through Henry Fielding, Stendhal, Jane Austen, Dostoyevsky, Proust, and ending with *Ulysses*.

What did a boy of twenty make of Proust's astonishing opening volume? About 15 percent of all it contained, I should guess. I recall being alternately bored, confused, and hugely impressed by the book. At the outset, I was much more taken with Charles Swann's self-torturing pursuit of the coquette Odette than I was with the little Marcel's longing for his *maman* and the older Marcel's cerebrations about time and memory. A good bit of the convolutions of poor M. Swann's exquisite masochism must have been lost on me as was a good deal else. "The value of the work," wrote Valéry in "Homage to Marcel Proust," "is equal to the amount of life we ourselves provide." At twenty, one does not have that large a deposit of life to bring to the task. Yet,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

somehow, for all my not really being up to the book, I knew I was in the presence of serious stuff, the real thing, and, like Henry Miller when a coin dropped from the purse of a woman he was making love to standing up in a dank hallway in Paris, I made a mental note to pick it up later.

I was in my early thirties when I made my first full frontal assault on *Remembrance of Things Past*. I now brought a little more life to it: fatherhood, a failed marriage, a decision to live a quiet and fairly bookish life. Still, the book, like all monumental works, was a climb. One had to be up for it, and stay up to keep stride with its brilliant author. Proust's is distinctly not a bedtime, nor a beach, nor a summer holiday book. It must be read at one's most alert hours, with an intellectual receptivity that one brings to the reading of one's own will and testament. It requires scrutiny but scrutiny enacted in a spirit of devotion.

For me this meant reading *Remembrance of Things Past* in the early morning hours. I tried to give the book an hour out of each day. In that hour I covered ten, sometimes fifteen, rarely twenty pages, depending upon whether the Proust portion for the day contained more analysis than narrative or narrative than analysis, though the two were so frequently intermixed that the distinction didn't always hold up. Seeking forward motion, I did not dally, struggling for complete lucidity and mastery over each difficult passage. Some mornings I was better than others: certain mornings, I read passages that I felt might just change my life; on other mornings, I felt myself obtuse and not at all up to my author; on all mornings, I knew I was in the presence of an astonishingly penetrating little half-Jewish, fully homosexual genius.

Proust was a genius on the same level as Henry James and, in my view, on a higher level than Sigmund Freud. I would later read Leon Edel, in the introduction to the fourth of his five-volume biography of James, make a similar though less invidious observation:

> On the level of art James was probing the same human experience—and in an analogously systematic if unconscious way—as Sigmund Freud, who was making his discoveries at this very moment in Vienna. And also at this same moment, in Paris, James's fellow artist, Marcel Proust, was engaged in examining that part of reflective experience which relates to association and memory. Proust, in the footsteps of Bergson, discovered for himself and demonstrated how a calling up of the past (which Freud was asking of his patients) establishes man in time, can give him an identity and reveal to him the realities of his being.

A work of the prodigious length of *Remembrance of Things Past* has its share of longueurs. But my tendency at the time was to assume that it was I and not Proust who was boring. ("Like many other men," Proust writes, "Swann had a naturally lazy mind and lacked imagination.") Certain characters interested me more than others: Swann, Mme. Verdurin, Saint-Loup, Vinteuil, Bergotte. Baron de Charlus, in especial, elicited my readerly pleasure: my attention went up when he appeared on the page, my heart sank ever so slightly when he departed.

I was always on the *qui vive* for snobbery, for at the top of the rap sheet on Marcel Proust is that he was a miserable snob. But by the time he came to write *Remembrance of Things Past* Proust was no longer a snob, but the great chronicler of snobbery, the greatest since the Duc de Saint-Simon, who was, I believe, a true snob and who operated on the principle of it takes one to know one. Proust took the fashionable world, in which snobbery is unavoidable, for his field of study, and, as Léon Daudet remarked, "the monde mattered to him as flowers matter to a botanist, not as they do to the man who buys the bouquet." He became, in other words, both the chronicler and the anatomist of snobbery.

George Painter, still Proust's best biographer and a man who has to have given Proust and the snobbery question as much thought as anyone in the world, in an interview with Phyllis Grosskurth remarked that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he didn't think Proust a snob. "He began as a snob," Painter said,

> partly because he was a Jew and a homosexual. If he could be accepted in the place where it was most difficult to get in at all, then that would make him feel better, feel more at home in the world. When he found that they [the great aristocrats of his day] had very similar failings to everybody else in his own middle classes or in the working classes of his servants, he was partly relieved, and perhaps a little disappointed. He often says how similar the bourgeois, the working-classes, and the aristocracy are in their ways, except that the working-classes are much kinder and more intelligent. He became an anti-snob.

Proust knew all about snobs, about upward- and downward-looking snobs, and what drove both sorts of snob. But after reading Proust, it is all but impossible to feel any regard for the modern aristocracy. "I had seen enough of fashionable society," he writes, "to know that it is there that one finds real illiteracy and not, let us say, among electricians." And then there is the great scene when poor Swann cannot get the Duchess de Guermantes to delay her departure for a party long enough to receive the news of his impending death, yet she can find time to change from black to red shoes. One does not come away from *Remembrance of Things Past* with keen admiration for the aristocracy. Quite the reverse.

My second full reading of Proust's novel took place in my middle forties. The occasion, if not the motive, for my rereading the book was the Terence Kilmartin revision of the C. Scott Moncrieff translation. I note that I had taken to sidelining, in a light pencil, passages that seemed to me significant. The number of these passages is vast. Their cast tends to be darkish. An example from *Time Regained*, Proust's final volume:

> Yes: if, owing to the work of oblivion, the returning memory can throw no bridge, form no connecting link between itself and the present minute, if it remains in the context of its own place and date, if it keeps its distance, its isolation in the hollow of a valley or upon the highest peak of a mountain summit, for this very reason it causes us suddenly to breathe a new air, an air which is new precisely because we have breathed it in the past, that purer air which the poets have vainly tried to situate in paradise and which could induce so profound a sensation of renewal only if it had been breathed before, since the true paradises are the paradises that we have lost.

With the notion of paradises lost, we are in the dense metaphysical jungle of time, Proust's larger subject. Reading him in my middle forties, now myself beginning to hear the clock tick more insistently, I was more attentive to his observations on time. These are set out most richly in *Time Regained*. Here one learns about "the incuriosity that is brought about by time"; the multifarious tricks time plays on memory, not least the contrast "between the mutability of people and the fixity of memory"; the search for those things that are extratemporal, for, as Proust writes, in a characteristic sentence:

> An hour is not merely an hour, it is a vase full of scents and sounds and projects and climates, and what we call reality is a certain connection between these immediate sensations and the memories which envelop us simultaneously with them—a connection that is suppressed in a simple cinematographic vision, which just because it professes to confine itself to the truth of the fact departs widely from it—a unique connection which the writer has to rediscover in order to link for ever in his phrase the two sets of phenomena which reality joins together.

The work of art, Proust holds, is the sole method for recapturing time, and no one gave the effort a more heroic attempt than this man whose own time would run out at the early age of fifty-one.

As the chronicler of the subtler alchemis-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

try that the passage of time wreaks, Proust understood the transitoriness of all things, and particularly of all passions. "But political passions," he writes in *The Captive*, the volume touching on the Dreyfus case, "are like all the rest, they do not last. New generations arise which no longer understand them; even the generation that experienced them changes, experiences new political passions which, not being modeled exactly upon their predecessors, rehabilitate some of the excluded, the reason for exclusion having altered."

If all is transitory, this includes happiness, the great human goal, the illusion of all illusions. "In Proust," as Howard Moss notes in his excellent *The Magic Lantern of Marcel Proust*, "the homosexuals are just as unhappy as the heterosexuals." But unhappiness is the condition toward which all tend. In good part, this is owing to the fact that, for Proust, the organizing principle of social life is snobbery, the chief emotion propelling love is jealousy. Proust can be an immensely amusing writer—his portraits of his gallery of snobs is comedy at its highest—but he is at the same time a darkly pessimistic one. Irrationality rules in his pages, kindness and generosity come to seem improbable. Selfishness, usually badly misconstrued, is persuasive. Only his artists—the painter Elstir, the writer Bergotte, the composer Vinteuil, the actress Berma, the dilettante art critic Swann—are allowed a measure of superiority, yet even they are often vaguely ridiculous. His despair, as perhaps befits a man ill all his days, is fundamental. And yet it is a despair that, conveyed through his pages, somehow doesn't depress—at least not this reader. The reason for this, I believe, is that cascading human brilliance at the height of its flow, which is how I should describe *Remembrance of Things Past*, is too grand a spectacle to allow for depression on the part of the spectator.

Perhaps more than any modern writer, Proust invites reading not merely for his story but for the power of his analysis—for, not to put too fine a point on it, his wisdom. One cannot read Proust without recognizing how, in his monumental book, he has recapitulated French literature. In the purely storytelling aspects of *Remembrance of Things Past*, one senses the great sweep of French fiction, the line that runs from Madame de Lafayette through Stendhal through Balzac and even through Zola to Proust. In its analytic aspect, one feels in the book the influence of Montaigne, La Rochefoucauld, La Bruyère, Pascal, Vauvenargues, Joubert, Chamfort, and the other French *moralistes*. Proust had the great French weakness—also glory—for generalization. So much is this so that Justin O'Brien, fifty years ago, extracted 428 maxims from the pages of Proust's novel, and set them out—in a small, bilingual book titled *Maxims*—under the five categories of "Man," "Society," "Love," "Art," and "Time and Memory." "Proust's love of generalizing," O'Brien wrote, "has never been hampered by his material, for the maxims occur as readily in the midst of descriptive or narrative passages as they do in the more reflective sections of the work."

These maxims give Proust's work, as O'Brien points out, its justly deserved "reputation for universality," but it also gives his novel its allure as wisdom literature. Proust's maxims are not, for the most part, of the quality of La Rochefoucauld's—most are not quite so polished as perfect maxims need to be—but they do have their own special power, arising as they do out of the long and elaborate story that is *Remembrance of Things Past*. Some are short and sharp: "After a certain age, the more one becomes oneself, the more obvious family traits become." Others, lengthier, such as this on neurotics, carry an equally high truth quotient:

> Who has not noticed this fact among women, and even men, gifted with exceptional intelligence but highly neurotic? When they are calm, happy, at peace with their surroundings, one cannot but admire their remarkable gifts and feel that their words are truth itself. A

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> headache or a slight wound to their vanity is enough to change everything. The luminous intelligence—now harsh, convulsive, shriveled up—reflects only an irritated, suspicious, vain personality striving by every means to make a bad impression.

Proust is especially good, in his aphoristic mode, on literary and artistic matters. "Each artist seems to be the citizen of an unknown country, lost even from his memory and different from the country whence will come, embarking earthward, another great artist." On criticism: "Each generation of critics does nothing but take the opposite of the truth accepted by their predecessors." And on the larger subject of style:

> To a writer as to a painter, style is a question not of technique but of vision. It is the revelation, which would be impossible by direct and conscious means, of the qualitative difference between our various ways of seeing the world—a difference which, but for art, would eternally remain the individual's secret.

Reading generally presents the possibility of the pleasures of plot, of style, of form, none of which need be gainsaid. But at the highest level it also holds out the prospect of wisdom, of truths previously unrevealed. Do many people still read—as I do—looking for secrets, for hitherto hidden keys that will open too-long-locked doors? It seems almost impossible to read Proust without this motive. His very style, the aphoristic shading into the philosophical, seems to invite it. Yet the trick here is not to come to him looking for answers to specific questions. ("I have an answer, I have an answer," calls out the Yeshiva boy, in the streets of his shtetl. "Does anybody have a question?")The trick is to have long in mind the questions for which Proust supplies the answers without himself even considering them questions.

To provide a personal example, I have long thought about the point of a literary education—the point, that is, of thoughtfully reading vast quantities of belletristic writing much of which time erases from one's memory. In part, the answer is to be found in the cultivation of sensibility; in part, I have also thought, in T. S. Eliot's lilting sentence about Henry James: "He had a mind so fine no idea could violate it." James, Eliot seems to me here to be saying, operated in the realm above ideas. Fair and true enough, but where or what is that realm and how does one arrive there in one's own thought? The most subtle formulation I have been able to discover I found in *Remembrance of Things Past*:

> Our intellect is not the most subtle, the most powerful, the most appropriate, instrument for revealing the truth. It is life that, little by little, example by example, permits us to see that what is most important to our hearts, or to our minds, is learned not by reasoning but through other agencies. Then it is that the intellect, observing their superiority, abdicates its control to them upon reasoned grounds and agrees to become their collaborator and lackey.

Proust seems here to be taking Pascal's "the heart has its reasons that reason cannot know" and further refining it to mean that only when reason gives way, gives primacy of place, to the heart does it have a chance to learn the heart's deeper reasons: the reasons that, finally, matter most of all.

Yet one probably does best not to press Proust's pages too hard in the hope of extracting ideas from them. People who have done so seem to have come up with fistfuls of grass in their hands. Céline, for example, found Proust Talmudic, or rather the Talmud Proustian, writing: "The Talmud is constructed and designed almost like Proust's novels, tortuous, . . . a chaotic mosaic." Of course, Céline's reading wasn't helped any by his anti-Semitism. Jean-Paul Sartre viewed Proust's work as bourgeois irresponsibility in its purest form: "Proust chose to be a bourgeois, he made himself the accomplice of bourgeois propaganda, because his work spread the myth of human nature." Not smart.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Great works of literature, like the figure of Henry James himself, exist on a plane where misconceived ideas can violate them. This is to say that, while of course literature is filled with ideational content, the ideas are not so easily separated from the stories, poems, and dramas in which they are embedded without doing great violence both to the ideas and to the stories, poems, and dramas themselves. "Poetry is what is lost in translation," said Robert Frost, adding: "It is also what is lost in interpretation." Literature, one might say, is often what gets lost when ideas are extracted too cleanly from literary works.

Which makes a book such as *How Proust Can Change Your Life: Not a Novel* by Alain de Botton an odd confection indeed.[1] De Botton, despite his altogether French name, writes in English and is the author of two previous novels of the youthful, clever, postmodern sort. Mr. de Botton has had the extraordinary notion of turning to Proust as a guide for everyday living. What makes this extraordinary is of course the fact that Marcel Proust himself probably did not live a single ordinary day in his life. Great writer though he was, Proust was as neurotic as a flea. He was a man who dined at the homes of friends in his overcoat. He not infrequently left waiters tips of 100 percent. He was a man who, beyond the age of thirty, still reported on the condition of his bowels and micturition to his mother. Let us not even speak of the cork-lined room in which he spent the last fourteen years of his life. He turned night into day, day into night, working as others slept, sleeping as they worked. Proust was also smart, subtle, an authentic literary genius. But a guide to life? I don't think so.

Yet Mr. de Botton makes out, in these pages, what might be called, in the cant phrase of the day, a best-case scenario. His book has the merit of containing some charming bits. Mr. de Botton imagines, for example, a genial meeting between Proust and James Joyce, unlike the cool and uneventful one (which De Botton recounts) that took place at dinner at the Ritz given by Violet and Sydney Schiff for Diaghilev and his troop of dancers and for the four geniuses of modern art the Schiffs most admired: Proust, Joyce, Stravinsky, and Picasso. Joyce arrived late, improperly dressed, and with not a very high opinion of his great rival in the field of the novel: "I observe a furtive attempt to run a certain M. Marcel Proust of here [Paris] against the signatory of this letter. I have read some pages of his. I cannot see any special talent but I am a bad critic." Proust claimed never to have read a page of Joyce. Alas, another of those potentially, magnificently fructifying meetings that failed to come off.

De Botton's book has other sweet bits. He informs us that Proust, like the painter Forain, had one of the early telephones available in France. He reports Fernand Gregh, one of Proust's friends, recounting how the verb "to proustify" came into being: "We created among ourselves the verb to proustify to express a slightly too conscious attitude of geniality, together with what would vulgarly have been called affectations, interminable and delicious." He underscores Proust's own point that, in some fundamental way, friendship and truthfulness are incompatible, for Proust would never tell a friend anything that might inflict the least hurt.

De Botton puts into rather better perspective the reason why André Gide, then a key editor at Gallimard, turned down the first volume of *Remembrance of Things Past*, and quotes Gide, writing to Proust, in self-extenuation for this most numbskulled of all editorial decisions: "For me, you had remained the man who frequented the house of Mme X, Y, Z, the man who wrote for the *Figaro*. I thought of you as—shall I confess it?—. . . a snob, a dilettante, a socialite." What Gide doesn't confess here is that, more likely, he failed to read Proust's thick manuscript, for had he done so all such presuppositions would have been instantly dispelled.

1 *How Proust Can Change Your Life: Not a Novel*, by Alain de Botton; Vintage, 208 pages, $12 paper.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Only rarely does Mr. de Botton cast doubt on his bona fides as a serious *proustolâtre*. He betrays his youthfulness, and the nature of his own undertaking, when, on page 165 of his book, he makes a poor joke by asking: "Did Proust have any relevant thoughts on dating? What should one talk about on a first date? And is it good to wear black?" He also refers to "a certain Madame Sert," which shows a less than complete control over the milieu (or "maloo," as Josephine Herbst used kiddingly to pronounce it), for Misia Sert, one of the great hostesses of the belle époque and friend to Mallarmé and so many other of the modern artists of France, deserves much more than the distancing diminishment of "a certain Madame Sert."

But of course Alain de Botton's book cannot hope to embrace even a thousandth part of the richness of Proust. Any man who could write, as Proust did in *Time Regained*, that "the horror that grand people have for the snobs who move heaven and earth to make their acquaintance is felt also by the virile man for the invert, by a woman for every man who is too much in love with her," thus economically demonstrating his subtle knowledge of three different worlds, cannot be contained within so slender, however genial, a volume as *How Proust Can Change Your Life*. The best audience for Alain de Botton's book might be those who have never read Proust but long have wished to have done, for it gives several powerful glints of the glories to be found in this richest of modern literary mines. But for those who know Proust, it seems very thin soup indeed.

Phyllis Rose's *Year of Reading Proust* is a vastly different kettle of caviar.[2] I write "caviar," not because I think the book pure caviar, but because there is something rather high-priced about the tastes of its author that plays out, in her pages, as unconscious comedy, though not everyone will find it amusing. I do, though chiefly in the way I find amusing the cast of characters around that overconfident and ignorant snob Mme. Verdurin, people so wrapped up in their own lives that they can have little or no notion that they just might be trivial.

One of the questions that one needs to ask when reading a great writer—it is often a painful but finally a pressing one—is, What would he or she think of me? How would I appear in the eyes of Tolstoy, George Eliot, Henry James, James Joyce? (Too often the answer, one fears, might well be: "Of no conceivable interest.") Of the great writers, Proust is perhaps the most tolerant, but I think nonetheless that he would have consigned Miss Rose to the crowd at Mme. Verdurin's, where she would have flourished among the happy, the self-satisfied, and the purblind.

Ostensibly, Miss Rose's book is about her attempt to complete Proust's great book after many earlier failures to get past its first hundred or so pages. In fact, the book is really a memoir, a year in its author's recent life in which she recounts her family history, habits, tastes, point of view, friendships, and quotidian life. It is a year in which she awaits the death of her aged mother, long ailing from congestive heart failure, a death that, by book's end, is not accomplished. But, then, as Miss Rose allows, at the time of writing, neither had she quite finished *Remembrance of Things Past*. As she remarks, she intends to use "Proust's masterpiece [as] my madeleine," to recall her own life, as the French biscuit dipped in tea did for Proust. But Proust offers only a frame for this book; at its center is the character of Phyllis Rose.

Phyllis Rose perhaps finds, one fears, altogether too bearable her astonishing lightness of being. Her husband—her second husband—is the son of the creator of the *Babar* books for children, who has continued to produce these books. They live in Connecticut and at Key West. She and her husband collect Roman glass and prints; she finds collecting, it seems important that you and I should know, a perfectly adequate

2 *The Year of Reading Proust: A Memoir in Real Time*, by Phyllis Rose; Scribner, 268 pages, $23.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

substitute for the "universal eroticization" of unmarried life. After years in psychotherapy, she concludes that "what was unique about me was that no one had ever hurt me." Hers was a happy childhood, awash in popular culture, which she still adores. "Nothing," she believes, "can cheapen the Beatles story"; a child of the Sixties, she had for some years imagined herself the sole girl Beatle. Email, she avers, "has given me back the spontaneity I had lost to the laziness of age." A professor of literature at Wesleyan University, author of books on Josephine Baker and on Victorian marriages, Miss Rose offers an example of the limits of education and of culture, for in her a vast overlay of both has not been able to cover up the inexhaustible shallows of a confident but unoriginal mind.

Miss Rose may think she is writing about Proust, but in fact she makes one wish we had a Proust around today to deal with the rich material she supplies in her memoir. Imagine what Proust might have done with Miss Rose's recounting the loss of her virginity after the assassination of John F. Kennedy. "It was part of the same biological response to grief, despair, and fear that led people to make love in the cattle cars on the way to Auschwitz, and I never felt guilty about it. . . ." She tells us a good deal about her dreams, confirming my own view that people who commit this exceedingly boring social act generally have more interesting dreams than actual lives. She has a deep friendship with another professor at Wesleyan who is homosexual, causing her to comment on "the sophisticated refinement of sex that homosexuality seemed to me to be." Proust could have filled her in a good bit here, too, for, as the pages from *Cities of the Plain* unmistakably reveal, he thought homosexuality very far from refined.

But the great Proustian scene, which Miss Rose simply isn't up to, because she is unaware of the inherent comedy of it, occurs in the latter portion of her book, when the novelist Robert Stone, a friend at Key West, asks her to prepare an important dinner for fifteen or sixteen, telling her it is for Sonny and Gita Mehta, the chief editor at the firm of Alfred A. Knopf and his wife. But Miss Rose soon comes to suspect that there are bigger fish to fry—or ought that to be bigger fish for whom to fry? The real reason for the dinner, the reason that its true guest could not be revealed, was because that guest was—can you bear the tension?—Salman Rushdie. Once she learns who it is she is to entertain, Miss Rose, without a scintilla of irony, writes: "That it would be a memorable evening for literature was true. It would be memorable for the Key West writers to meet Rushdie. And the meeting ought to be special. A great writer, a martyr to art, was owed a special evening."

The dinner for Rushdie turned out to be a bit of a fizzle. Conversations never quite meshed; the wrong subjects came up. Sonny Mehta failed to arrive. The disappointments of a snob, even an unconscious snob, can be poignant. (One recalls Chips Channon, in his diary, recording that, such was his elation at having two reigning sovereigns in his home, he became so drunk that he had no memory of the entire evening.) "It kept getting away from me," Miss Rose writes, who adds, "Of all the forms of creativity, hostessing is one of the most treacherous." Perhaps, à la Mme. Verdurin, she should have arranged to have played for the company Vinteuil's haunting sonata.

"I had flunked the test of Proust," Miss Rose remarks apropos of her slowness in picking up on the fact that the dinner Robert Stone asked her to give was for Salman Rushdie. "I flubbed the hard, minute work of perception. I let the insight go out of my mind so entirely that I hadn't even realized there was a 'mystery guest.'" Ah, she cannot know it, but poor Miss Rose has flunked an even graver test. In this book she demonstrates herself to be one of those people, of a kind not infrequently found in Proust, who are deprived of humor, irony, and the least measure of perspective, and hence of significant self-knowledge itself. A snob of the American educated classes, far

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from being possessed of Proustian insight, she is herself a contemporary version of a Proustian figure.

As for that Proustian test, it has to do not with quickness of perception, though Proust clearly must himself have been a man, as was said of Henry James, "assailed by perceptions." It has to do with something broader, something deeper. Marcel Proust, for all his neurotic tics, was a very savvy man, a man engaged with reality on the most fundamental level. Reading Proust has to do with the meshing, so impressive in Proust himself, of culture and reality. The Proustian test comes, finally, in the ability to keep in balance the contradictory notions that the world, for all its pleasures, is also a place of low deceits, vicious insensitivities, gargantuan self-deceptions, snobberies little and large, and yet, for those who cultivate awareness, it remains nonetheless a profoundly amusing place—no less profound than amusing.

In his last months, Proust told Céleste Alberet: "People will read me, yes, the whole world will read, and you'll see, Céleste. Remember this: it took a hundred years for Stendhal to become known. It will not take Marcel Proust as many as fifty." He was of course correct. He was correct because he understood, with great precision, what his own indefatigable work provided its small but hardy band of readers.

In *Time Regained*, Proust wrote: "Every reader is, in reading, a reader of himself. The writer's work is merely a kind of optical instrument, which he offers the reader so that the latter may make things out in himself that he might otherwise not have seen." If one is fortunate, if one brings to Proust a freshness of mind and the spirit of homage properly owed to a truly superior mind, one has a chance, slim but genuine, to become perhaps a little smarter about the world. For those of us who do not make any distinction between experience and reading, but believe that reading is experience, experience acquired in tranquility, Marcel Proust is our man.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The better James Baldwin

by Brooke Allen

Anyone familiar with the fiction and nonfiction of James Baldwin is aware that the formative influence upon his life and career was his stepfather. Baldwin was an illegitimate child; when he was three years old his mother married David Baldwin, a Southerner who had come to New York as part of the large stream of black migration north after the First World War. The elder Baldwin labored in a Long Island factory during the week and preached in Harlem storefront churches on Sundays. As a preacher, he was passionate but hardly successful: his increasingly bitter harangues were off-putting to his congregations, and he descended, over the years, to ever smaller, grimier, and more insignificant houses of worship.

Young Jimmy was never told that David Baldwin was not his real father, a fact that he discovered quite by accident when he was a teenager. He was in effect the eldest Baldwin child in what was to become a large family. David Baldwin was a powerful, brooding presence who cast a pall over the entire family. "He looked to me, as I grew older," James Baldwin wrote, "like pictures I had seen of African tribal chieftains: he really should have been naked, with warpaint on and barbaric mementos, standing among spears." He was "the most bitter man I have ever met," who emanated "absolutely unabating tension. . . . I do not remember, in all those years, that one of his children was ever glad to see him come home."

Baldwin portrayed his stepfather in all his rage, violence, and religious hypocrisy as the preacher Gabriel Grimes in his first novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, and in that novel he also described his own temporary religious conversion, his experience, as a teenager, of being "saved." He acknowledged that his decision, at the age of fourteen, to become a child preacher was a way in which he could confront his stepfather on his own terms and his own turf, and beat him there. This task turned out to be almost pathetically easy, for David Baldwin's simmering rage and hatred, never far below the surface, made him an unpopular preacher, while Jimmy, endowed with the charm of youth and with the verbal glibness that was later to mar so much of his writing, made an immediate hit.

It was only a few short years before the younger Baldwin came to recognize his father's brand of religion—and by extension his own—for what it was: a justification of, and consolation for, the cruelties and injustices that black Americans felt powerless to change, and the sublimation of the debilitating anger that threatened at every minute to overpower them: a "dread, chronic disease, the unfailing symptom of which is a kind of blind fever, a pounding in the skull and fire in the bowels. Once this disease is contracted, one can never be really carefree again. . . . There is not a Negro alive who does not have this rage in his blood—one has the choice, merely, of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

living with it consciously or surrendering to it."

David Baldwin had surrendered to it long since, a process his stepson vividly re-imagined in *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. "Hating and fearing every living soul including his children who had betrayed him, too, by reaching towards the world which had despised him," the elder Baldwin went, over the years, from being merely an angry man to one who was literally mad. Laid off from his job, he took to sitting all day at the kitchen table, gazing out of the window and shouting Old Testament curses; eventually he refused to eat, claiming that his family was trying to poison him, and wandered in the streets until he was committed to a state mental institution. Raving and paranoid to the end, he died of tuberculosis just before his stepson's nineteenth birthday.

To James Baldwin, his stepfather remained, throughout his life, a fearsome example of what the same "dread, chronic disease" might work on him or on any of his black friends. The picture of his stepfather was never far from his mind, and when, as a young essayist and fledgling novelist, he decided in 1948 to leave New York for Paris, he looked on the move as flight, a necessary measure to keep him from going the same way. "By this time . . . I was mad, as mad as my dead father. If I had not gone mad, I could not have left." "I knew the tension in me between love and power, between pain and rage, and the curious, the grinding way I remained extended between these poles—perpetually attempting to choose the better rather than the worse."

The story of James Baldwin's career is in essence the story of that attempt. The question is whether or not he succeeded in it. I believe that the attempt was real—was, in fact, profoundly earnest—but that over the long run he failed; that, although he knew enough to choose "the better" initially, he lacked the stamina and the courage for the long-term effort. The Library of America's new editions of Baldwin's essays[1] and early novels,[2] both volumes selected and edited by Toni Morrison, offer the opportunity to assess the career as a whole.

In *Collected Essays*, Ms. Morrison has brought together the published collections, *Notes of a Native Son* (1955), *Nobody Knows My Name* (1961), *The Fire Next Time* (1963), *No Name in the Street* (1972), and *The Devil Finds Work* (1976), and thirty-six previously uncollected pieces. With the fiction, however, she has exercised far stricter control: she has included only the first three novels, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), *Giovanni's Room* (1956), and *Another Country* (1962), as well as the short story collection *Going to Meet the Man* (1965). Omitted, in other words, are not only Baldwin's plays, *Blues for Mister Charlie* (1964) and *The Amen Corner*, but his three later novels, *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* (1968), *If Beale Street Could Talk* (1974), and *Just Above My Head* (1979). The omission of these novels is an act of mercy, both to Baldwin and to the reader, for they are fatuous, meandering, unedited rehashes of his earlier themes, and their inclusion would have done Baldwin's current reputation far more harm than good.

The ultimate power of a serious novel, as opposed to that of a comic one, lies in its level of sincerity, the intensity with which it is felt. A great novel, though it does many other things as well, always communicates a potent emotional force. *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, published when Baldwin was twenty-nine, is a very good novel, possibly a great one; it reaches a level of fine emotional honesty that none of his other fiction, not even the popular *Giovanni's Room*, would find. It is his most autobiographical piece of work and at the same time his most imaginative; it is the only one, I believe, that lives up to his dictum that "all artists, if they are to survive, are forced, at last, to tell

---

1 *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, edited by Toni Morrison; The Library of America, 869 pages, $35.

2 *James Baldwin: Early Novels and Stories*, edited by Toni Morrison; The Library of America, 970 pages, $35.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the whole story, to vomit the anguish up. All of it, the literal and the fanciful."

Go Tell It on the Mountain tells the story of the Baldwin family as James Baldwin knew it, and its history as he imagined it. Most of it takes place during a cathartic session of shouting, singing, and testifying in a Baptist church in Harlem, during which the collective history of the Grimes family is related in an interwoven series of flashbacks. Young John Grimes—James Baldwin at the age of about fourteen—is the central consciousness, as he observes the goings-on in church with the sensible cynicism of extreme youth. His stepfather, Gabriel, dislikes him and justifies the dislike by identifying the boy with Sin, in this case the sexual sin of his mother. John, like Baldwin, finds himself "saved" at the end of the novel, but as in Baldwin's case the experience is spurious, a dishonest fashion of incorporating emotional crisis, or of finding a way to bear that which cannot be borne.

The religion of the adults, of course, is equally false, and in a series of three stunningly executed flashbacks we learn much about Gabriel Grimes, his wife Elizabeth, and his sister Florence: what they are, and what has brought them to this moment on their knees before a false God. Exposed are Gabriel's own sin and grief, Elizabeth's lost chance for love, and Florence's anger, ambition, and blighted hopes. The language is pithy; the descriptive passages, brief and always to the point. There are a few false notes: Richard, John's dead father, is too obviously the father the author would dearly love to have had rather than a real human being like Gabriel or like John himself, and the long sections of singing and prayer go on too long, and make their statement too obviously. But as a whole the novel is wonderfully true.

Baldwin certainly endorsed Marx's opinion that religion is the opium of the masses. He himself saw it, most specifically, as the opium of the oppressed. In *The Fire Next Time*, he wrote:

> The principles governing the rites and customs of the churches in which I grew up did not differ from the principles governing the rites and customs of other churches, white. The principles were Blindness, Loneliness, and Terror, the first principle necessarily and actively cultivated in order to deny the two others. I would love to believe that the principles were Faith, Hope, and Charity, but this is clearly not so for most Christians, or for what we call the Christian world. . . . there was no love in the church. It was a mask for hatred and self-hatred and despair.

What makes *Go Tell It on the Mountain* so remarkably skillful is the way in which it exposes the falsity of this sort of "religious" impulse while at the same time using the metaphors of Christian doctrine to expose real truths. Elisha, a kind and frightened young man who has taken refuge from the world's challenges by becoming a deacon and giving his life to the church, is telling the truth—though it is not quite the truth he understands—when he says "The Devil, he don't ask for nothing less than your life. And he take it, too, and it's lost forever. . . . You in darkness while you living and you in darkness when you dead. . . . [The Devil] got as many faces . . . as you going to see between now and the time you lay your burden down."

Go Tell It on the Mountain is a story of the world Baldwin was born into. The world that he penetrated, and of which he became a central figure, was very different indeed, and his subsequent fiction is accordingly different from that one early novel. The Harlem of his childhood, during the 1920s and 1930s, retained a certain "small town" aura: most of the inhabitants came from the South (known as the "Old Country"), with a strong family, church, and neighborhood tradition. At the age of eighteen, Baldwin left this insular community forever and took up residence in bohemia, where he would spend the rest of his life: first Greenwich Village, later Paris, Istanbul, and St. Paul-de-Vence. Most of his subsequent novels deal with international bohemia, and it is significant that they never captured their

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

world with anything like the immediacy and the unselfconsciousness of Baldwin's Harlem novel.

Giovanni's Room, Baldwin's second novel, is generally considered his best or his second-best. In its day, it created a sensation: an explicitly homosexual work, shocking and revolutionary, published at the height of the conservative Eisenhower era. Its novelty factor was so great that assessment of its real merits was inevitably distorted. Now, over forty years later, *Giovanni's Room* is no longer at all shocking. Is it any good?

Baldwin was much taken with Henry James at the time he wrote *Giovanni's Room*, and this obsession is reflected a little too obviously in the novel's structure and themes. The narrator is David, a young, white East Coaster. He has gone off to Paris for the traditional postcollege jaunt and then, like his fictional progenitor Chad Newsome, has lingered on, emotionally unprepared to go home and settle down to "real life." His father has begun to lose patience and is cutting off funds. His American girlfriend, Hella, currently traveling in Spain, is making preliminary noises about marriage.

David, like Chad, has become inconveniently entangled, but in his case it is not with a European woman but with a European man, the handsome Italian barman Giovanni. Giovanni is vital, vulnerable, unstable; Hella, on the other hand, is endowed with every virtue of the unexciting, American variety. Which of the two will David choose?

There is no surprise ending, because *Giovanni's Room* is told in flashback by an extremely depressed David the night before Giovanni is to be executed for murder. We are given to know from the very beginning that David eventually rejects Giovanni; and we are also given to understand that in rejecting him he not only ruins Giovanni's life but denies his own nature and gives up every chance of happiness; in effect he sells his soul.

So far from being shocking, *Giovanni's Room* now appears merely a romantic, rather sentimental little novel. It is not without certain virtues: the scenes in the gay bars, and especially the conversations between the *vieilles folles*, are amusing. But the main action is more melodrama than drama, and the characters are nothing but types. David and Hella are mere ciphers, the first manifestations of Baldwin's already atrophying stereotype of white Americans, while the lovely Giovanni is a cardboard figure, a stage Italian: "It might have been better," David says of him, "if he'd stayed down there in that village of his in Italy and planted his olive trees and had a lot of children and beaten his wife. He used to love to sing. . . ." He is supposed to be "vivid" and "winning," but his dialogue shows none of these traits; we are compelled to take David's unconvincing word for everything.

There is also, of course, the older, sophisticated European, a stock character in Baldwin's subsequent work. Here it is the dissipated old queen, Jacques, who advises David to love Giovanni: "Love him and let him love you. Do you think anything else under heaven really matters? And how long, at the best, can it last? since you are both men and still have everywhere to go? . . . You play it safe long enough . . . and you'll end up trapped in your own dirty body, forever and forever and forever—like me." And then there is the obligatory Jamesian motif, portentously intoned by Hella: "Americans should never come to Europe . . . it means they never can be happy again. What's the good of an American who isn't happy? Happiness was all we had."

The high artificiality of the dialogue comes as an unpleasant surprise after the relaxed, natural speech of the characters in *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. Perhaps it stems from the fact that David, Hella, and Giovanni are types, ideas rather than human beings, while Gabriel, Florence, and the other characters in *Go Tell It on the Mountain* resemble real people. Or perhaps it is because Baldwin has too little experience

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with the background, the class, the geographical rootedness he has imagined for them. When Knopf, Baldwin's publishers, received the manuscript of *Giovanni's Room*, they were unenthusiastic: Baldwin chose to believe it was because they had him pegged as a rising "Negro writer" who would prove consistently marketable as such, and didn't want him straying into untried territory. It is possible, however, that they sensed, and were distressed by, a false, stagy quality that was never again to be absent from his fiction.

In writing from the point of view of a white character, Baldwin was experimenting with what he conceived of as a "literature of integration." Almost alone among radical black intellectuals of the period, he praised his friend William Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (1967), in which the white, Southern novelist took on the persona of a black narrator, the leader of a tragic slave uprising. Baldwin felt strongly that Styron was to be respected for having even attempted this imaginative leap; it was, perhaps, not so different from the leap he himself had essayed with *Giovanni's Room*. Now that we are able to view both books at several decades' distance from the brouhaha that surrounded their publication, it is evident that Baldwin's attempt was far less successful than Styron's—at least from my own, admittedly white, point of view.

And Baldwin's fiction continued to deteriorate: *Another Country*, his next novel, has all the faults of *Giovanni's Room* without its virtues of economy, structure, and good editing. This rambling book deals with a group of artistic Greenwich Villagers—gay and straight, white and black, male and female—and their various love affairs, and it is a mess: an undisciplined, immature, stupefyingly talky piece of work. Every character sounds exactly like every other character, and they all sound like Baldwin, even the children. The "dialogue" is downright funny:

> It would be wonderful if it could be like that; you're very beautiful, Eric. But I don't, really, dig you the way I guess you must dig me. You know? And if we tried to arrange it, prolong it, control it, if we tried to take more than what we've—by some miracle, some miracle, I swear—stumbled on, then I'd just become a parasite and we'd both shrivel. So what can we really do for each other except—just love each other and be each other's witness? And haven't we got the right to hope—for more? So that we can really stretch into whoever we really are?

The semicolons, the dependent clauses, the qualifications: it all sounds a little like Henry James oddly transformed into a stoned hipster.

Baldwin saw himself as following in the tradition of James, and addressing the American condition rather than simply the black condition. To a certain extent he did so, in his first two novels and, far more effectively, in his essays of the Fifties and Sixties. He was certainly capable of delivering home truths: some of his statements and contentions continue to be as disturbing today as they were when they were written. For instance:

> The real role of the Negro leader, in the eyes of the American Republic, was not to make the Negro a first-class citizen but to keep him content as a second-class one.

> When the American people revile . . . the Haitian, Cuban, Turk, Palestinian, Iranian, they are really cursing the nigger, and the nigger had better know it.

> The only time you'll hear nonviolence admired is when black men preach and practice it. Whites admire violence in themselves.

And America, he wrote, is "a society much given to smashing taboos without thereby managing to be liberated from them."

These provocative statements would seem to elegantly refute Norman Mailer's remark that Baldwin was incapable of saying "fuck you" to the reader. But as time

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

went on, Baldwin's work becomes increasingly studded with silly and meaningless generalizations. *The Fire Next Time* (1963), a long essay about Elijah Muhammed and the Black Muslim movement, is his last really good piece of nonfiction: from that point on he began to go over the top. *No Name in the Street*, his 1972 essay collection, shows Baldwin's transformation from a thinking, reflecting human being to a virtual automaton, a sort of Charlie McCarthy dummy who could be relied upon to spew out whatever fashionable radical opinion was currently most fashionable and most radical.

In middle age, Baldwin claimed cynically that he had once been "the Great Black Hope of the Great White Father." Here he was referring to the reputation he began to enjoy after the publication of his influential essay "Everybody's Protest Novel," which appeared in *Zero* in 1949 and was anthologized six years later in *Notes of a Native Son*. This essay was in essence an oblique attack on Richard Wright—the first of several father-figures Baldwin was to symbolically slay—which compared Wright's *Native Son* with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, lumping them both together in the category of "protest novel." It was a thoughtful piece of work which is perhaps even more pertinent today than it was at the time it was written.

> The avowed aim of the American protest novel is to bring greater freedom to the oppressed. They are forgiven, on the strength of these good intentions, whatever violence they do to language, whatever excessive demands they make of credibility. It is, indeed, considered the sign of a frivolity so intense as to approach decadence to suggest that these books are both badly written and wildly improbable. One is told to put first things first, the good of society coming before niceties of style or characterization. Even if this were incontestable—for what exactly is the "good" of society?—it argues an insuperable confusion, since literature and sociology are not one and the same; it is impossible to discuss them as if they were. . . . The failure of the protest novel lies in its rejection of life, the human being, the denial of his beauty, dread, power, in its insistence that it is his categorization alone which is real and which cannot be transcended.

This essay epitomizes Baldwin's early thinking. He was determined to escape his own categorization as a "Negro writer" as he had escaped ghettoization in a purely black community: in the Village, and later in Paris, he cultivated a wide circle of friends, both black and white. As a Civil Rights activist and spokesman, he declared himself an integrationist, a follower of King, and initially rejected the credo of the separatist Black Muslims. He wrote, again and again, of the possibility, indeed the necessity, of regenerative love between members of the races.

Yet by the late Sixties Baldwin had lost his spark of freshness and optimism forever, and had taken to the pernicious habit of "categorization" far more enthusiastically than Richard Wright ever did. He repeatedly expressed his newly developed opinion that "white Americans are probably the sickest and certainly the most dangerous people, of any color, to be found in the world today," and his essays, fiction, and the Broadway play *Blues for Mister Charlie* all illustrate that notion. He invented his own version of America, a country blighted by "an emotional poverty so bottomless, and a terror of human life, of human touch, so deep, that virtually no American appears able to achieve any viable, organic connection between his public stance and his private life."

What caused this depressing turnaround? Probably a combination of factors. Genuine political disillusionment certainly entered into it; the murders of King and Medgar Evers shocked him deeply. Also his schedule and his habits, which had never been conducive to concentrated periods of work, became even less so as he aged. His drinking grew heavier, his hours later, his social life increasingly frenetic; terrified of solitude, he surrounded himself at all times with an entourage of acolytes and gigolos.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There was also an attention-getting element to Baldwin's displays of bitterness and rage, an attempt to seem more-radical-than-thou, for the fact remained that he was not taken entirely seriously by the militant branch of the Black Power movement. It must have been deeply humiliating to him when Eldridge Cleaver wrote that Baldwin's work contained "the most grueling, agonizing, total hatred of the blacks, particularly of himself, and the most shameful, fanatical, fawning, sycophantic love of the whites that one can find in the writings of any black American writer of note in our time."

Baldwin's later work is written as though to refute this truly unfair claim and to assert to the world his own radical credentials. Over and over again, he schematizes America, dividing it into whites (self-deluding, infantile, ignorant, sexually cold) and blacks (passionate, sensual, sophisticated, knowing). His two stock white characters are the Southern redneck, like Lyle in *Blues for Mister Charlie*, and the lily-livered liberal, like Richard in *Another Country*. His stock black character is, above all, the passionate, tortured, and sensual artist. Where once he had stated his faith that the country could only be healed through love, real love between any black and any white was now deemed impossible. No white, however desperately he tried to bridge the gap, however abjectly he might grovel or abase himself, could ever understand a black, or redeem the crimes of his own race, or even be allowed to have an opinion on the subject. Whites were always wrong, always implicated in the crime of racial bigotry.

Baldwin eventually depicted White America as more than just a sick society; he claimed that it was in fact a conspiracy. Baldwin had always endorsed the concept of collective responsibility. In his saner days, he had stated his views eloquently: "The world in which people find themselves is not simply a vindictive plot imposed on them from above; it is also the world they have helped to make. They have helped both to make and to sustain it by sharing the assumptions which hold their world together." Now, however, he descended into paranoid raving. Society's ills were not simply a result of failings like ignorance, apathy, and prejudice, but of an active, well-organized plot hatched by white supremacists—that is, all whites.

> Whites, thinking "If you can't beat them, stone them," dumped drugs into the ghetto.
>
> The educational system of this country is, in short, designed to destroy the black child. It does not matter whether it destroys him by stoning him in the ghetto or by driving him mad in the isolation of Harvard.
>
> Therefore, in a couple of days, blacks may be using the vote to outwit the Final Solution. Yes. The Final Solution.
>
> I yet contend that the mobs in the streets of Hitler's Germany were in the street not only by the will of the German State, but by the will of the western world, including those architects of human freedom, the British, and the presumed guardian of Christian and human morality, the Pope.

In *The Fire Next Time*, Baldwin had considered Elijah Muhammed's call for a separate, black nation in America, the ultimate segregation. He considered it carefully: after all, he wrote, "If this sentiment is honored when it falls from the lips of Senator Byrd, then there is no reason why it should not be honored when it falls from the lips of Malcolm X." But he concluded that "the Negro has been formed by this nation, for better or for worse, and does not belong to any other—not to Africa, and certainly not to Islam. . . . we, the black and the white, deeply need each other here if we are really to become a nation."

Yet in subsequent years Baldwin's own philosophy became even more intransigent and impossible than that of the Black Muslims. At least they had a solution to propose; he, it seemed, had none. He had dismissed his earlier ideas about love and mu-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tual connection as having been naïve, but he had nothing with which to replace them, and while he insisted that America was both black and white and must remain so, all of his work, fiction and nonfiction, implicitly denied the possibility of merging and connecting. As Baldwin aged—he died in 1987 at the age of sixty-three—his writing and his statements became increasingly irrational until it seemed that his worst nightmare had come true: he, like his stepfather, had gone mad.

If Baldwin considered himself to have a literary idol, it was probably Henry James; but as a writer and as a cultural influence, Baldwin was in fact much closer, at least in his better work, to the Englishman E. M. Forster than he was to James, his compatriot and fellow exile. Forster and Baldwin shared an almost religious faith in the sacramental and redemptive nature of love, and specifically of the sexual act. They also shared and propagated a simplistic and nonsensical stereotype of Anglo-Saxon culture as frozen, antisensual, emotionally out of touch, and unnatural, and a corresponding sentimental notion of non-Anglos as elemental, natural, and free: Forster's prototype of the sexy Mediterranean corresponds perfectly to Baldwin's prototype of the brilliant and intense Harlem jazz musician. Both homosexuals, the two writers idealized male characteristics and male friendship and show only a token interest in women, and a cursory understanding of them.

Like Forster, Baldwin was, at least at the beginning, an idealist. The extraordinary rage with which he reacted to the inadequacies of human behavior presupposes an idealism about what human behavior might or should be which few people of his high intelligence share; only an essential idealist could finally end up so bitter, so disappointed by the vagaries of the human animal.

Again like Forster, Baldwin believed that art and social criticism were, and should be, inextricably linked. In "The Creative Process," an essay published in *Creative America* in 1962 and not previously anthologized, Baldwin brilliantly explores the role of the artist.

> Society must accept some things as real; but [the artist] must always know that the visible reality hides a deeper one, and that all our action and all our achievement rests on things unseen. A society must assume that it is stable, but the artist must know, and he must let us know, that there is nothing stable under heaven. One cannot possibly build a school, teach a child, or drive a car without taking some things for granted. The artist cannot and must not take anything for granted. . . .

For as long as he took nothing for granted, Baldwin made a substantial contribution to the literature and the cultural dialogue of his time. It was when he broke his own rules and started to assume, started taking things for granted, that his contribution sadly ceased to be valid.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Four poems by Michelangelo

translated & with an introduction by John Frederick Nims

We may wonder how Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564) came to poetry at all. Through his sculpture, we might say. He was fifteen when a carving of his caught the eye of Lorenzo de' Medici, who was so impressed that he took the boy into his own home. During the two years spent at the palazzo of Lorenzo, who was himself a poet of distinction, Michelangelo must have heard much poetry and much talk of poetry. Somewhat later, when he was the guest of a nobleman in Bologna, he delighted his host by reading aloud, in his Tuscan accent, from the Italian poets. Dante he knew almost by heart. When he was about twenty-eight, already famous for his *Pietà*, his *David*, and other works, we are told that for a time he did nothing with brush or chisel, but instead devoted his time to reading poetry and writing sonnets for his own pleasure, turning to verse for what he could not express through sculpture or painting.

From his late twenties until he was nearly sixty, his life was a tumult of activity: quarrying stones in the mountains, harassed by conflicting commitments, busy for years with the famous ceiling and the Medici chapel, even supervising the fortifications of Florence in a time of crisis. From those decades, we have fewer than two poems a year, many, like most of his sculptures, unfinished. But in the fifteen years that followed, the period of his two great loves, his literary output almost quadrupled. He was fifty-seven when he met the handsome Roman aristocrat Tommaso de' Cavalieri, then about twenty-three. For Tommaso some of Michelangelo's greatest sonnets were written, expressing an ardor his Platonism justified by seeing in his friend a beauty beyond that of earth. The sonnets had grown less frequent when, a few years later, Michelangelo met Vittoria Colonna, widowed poet and marchesa, one of the most distinguished women of her time, honored by pope and emperor. Living much of the year in convents and devoted to church reform, Vittoria was not to be addressed with the sensuous fervor of the sonnets for Tommaso. Her role was to correct and fortify his own soul by her example and to direct his thoughts to the afterlife: he was beginning *The Last Judgment* about the time that he met her.

His sculpture and painting, rarely or never mentioned in earlier poetry, now become a source of imagery for such sonnets as the four translated here. In the more fanciful madrigal (241), he compares the artist's development to the evolution of the universe: since the artist learns to do his best work (he says) only toward the close of his life, and since nature has at last produced supreme beauty in the unnamed Vittoria, it must mean that the earth is near its end. When Vittoria died after a dozen years of friendship, there were no more love poems for man or woman, Michelangelo's focus turning to a tormented but ardent colloquy with God.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

151

Non ha l'ottimo artista alcun concetto
ch'un marmo solo in sé non circonscriva
col suo superchio, e solo a quello arriva
la man che ubbidisce all'intelletto.
Il mal ch'io fuggo, e 'l ben ch'io mi prometto,
in te, donna leggiadra, altera e diva,
tal si nasconde; e perch'io più non viva,
contraria ho l'arte al disiato effetto.
Amor dunque non ha, né tua beltate
o durezza o fortuna o gran disdegno
del mio mal colpa, o mio destino o sorte;
se dentro del tuo cor morte e pietate
porti in un tempo, e che 'l mio basso ingegno
non sappia, ardendo, trarne altro che morte.

236

Se ben concietto ha·lla divina parte
il volto e gli acti d'alcun, po' di quello
doppio valor con breve e vil modello
dà vita a' sassi, e non è forza d'arte.
Né altrimenti in più rustiche carte,
anz'una pronta man prenda 'l pennello,
fra ' docti ingegni il più acorto e bello
pruova e rivede, e suo storie comparte.
Simil di me model di poca istima
mie parto fu, per cosa alta e prefecta
da voi rinascer po', donna alta e degnia.
Se 'l poco acresce, e 'l mie superchio lima
vostra mercé, qual penitenzia aspecta
mie fiero ardor, se mi gastiga e 'nsegnia?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

151

Nothing the best of artists can conceive
but lies, potential, in a block of stone,
superfluous matter round it. The hand alone
can free it that has intelligence for guide.
The peril I'm running from, the good descried
in you, proud lovely lady—yes, heaven's own!—
are virtual in yourself. I'm doomed, I groan:
art thwarting the very end it longs to have.
Not love, then, and not your beauty, your famous name,
disdain or marble mien, fate high or low,
is the cause I languish long here, hold my breath.
If mercy and doom in your heart attend, then blame
my feeble wit: though the two affect me so,
it can realize the one only. And that's death.

236

If by its heaven-sent power the mind conceives
a true version of face and form, then roughs in clay
a crude model, the workman's hand and heart in play
confer on cold stone a life, and not just by skill.
The same with paint: not a brush is raised until
mind sifts, from its cunning cues, the apt and best
—this even with rough designs—rejects the rest
as it culls, deploys, thinks better of, retrieves.
I'm like that model, as crude as you'd come across,
exalted lady, till born again through you,
elate, pristine, as your cleansing auras reach me.
Where I lack, you add; where I'm rough, you file and gloss
in your kindly care for me. What amends are due
for my furores past, as your ways rebuke and teach me?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

239

Com'esser, donna, può quel ch'alcun vede
per lunga sperienza, che più dura
l'inmagin viva im pietra alpestra e dura
che 'l suo factor, che negli anni in cener riede?
La causa a l'efecto inclina e cede,
onde dall'arte è vinta la natura.
I' 'l so, che 'l pruovo in la bella scultura,
ch'all'opra il tempo e morte non tien fede.
Dunche, posso ambo noi dar lunga vita
in qual sie modo, o di colore o sasso,
di noi sembrando l'uno e l'altro volto;
sì che mill'anni dopo la partita,
quante voi bella fusti e quant'io lasso
si veggia, e com'amarvi i' non fu' stolto.

241

Negli anni molti e nelle molte pruove,
cercando, il saggio al buon concecto arriva
d'un'immagine viva,
vicino a morte, im pietra alpestra e dura;
ch'all'alte cose nuove
tardi si viene, e poco poi si dura.
Similmente natura,
di tempo in tempo, d'uno in altro volto,
s'al sommo, errando, di bellezza è giunta
nel tuo divino, è vechia, e de' perire:
onde la tema, molto
con la beltà congiunta,
di stranio cibo pasce il gran desire;
né so pensar né dire
qual nuoca o giovi più, visto 'l tuo 'specto,
o 'l fin dell'universo o 'l gran dilecto.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

239

My lady, how comes it about—what all can see
from long experience—that rough mountain stone
carved to a living form, survives its own
creator, who'll end as ashes in an urn?

Cause lesser than its effect. From which we learn
how nature is less than art, as well I know
whose many a lively statue proves it so,
which time and the tomb exempt, grant amnesty.

Mine then, the power to give us, you and me,
a long survival in—choose it—stone or color,
faces just like our own, exact and true.

Though we're dead a thousand years, still men can see
how beautiful you were; I, how much duller,
and yet how far from a fool in loving you.

241

Through many a year and many a vain assay
exploring, the cunning artist from his thought
a living image wrought
—as death drew near—by chipping at mountain stone.
Things grand in a new way
come to one slowly, and they dwindle soon.
So earth has shown
this face and that as various ages vied,
till trial and error brought beauty its divine
zenith in you. Earth's old then; soon to die:
that's why the terror, tied
to beauty as both entwine,
banquets my hungry soul perversely; I
can't answer which, or why,
most pleases or most plagues, with your face in sight:
great nature's doomsday, or my love's delight.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Theater

Critics & collectors

by Mark Steyn

"No statue has ever been put up to a critic," Sibelius is supposed to have said, offering up an aperçu in which the world's legions of slighted artists have been only too happy to take refuge. The aphorism, it seems to me, has one basic defect: it rather overlooks how few statues there are to composers, authors, and painters, at least when compared to kings, generals, and prime ministers: you wouldn't, in other circumstances, find the artsy crowd so eager to endorse the values of public statuary. Besides, by no means all critics want for honors. Brooks Atkinson and Walter Kerr, both of *The New York Times*, have Broadway theaters named after them; their predecessor, Alexander Woollcott, is memorialized in a cocktail, the Brandy Alexander. It's a passably diverting game to divide their successors into those whose immortality would be more aptly conferred by the theater's marquee or by its bar. It's hard to imagine a Brandy Frank. On the other hand, it's even harder to imagine a Frank Rich Theatre, unless it was permanently closed. As for the present occupant of the *Times* chair, Ben Brantley seems to be piling up his own premature memorial in the startling number of press columns, from *In Theater* to the Toronto *Globe and Mail*, bemoaning the loss of the paper's critical authority. For the first time in decades, a *Times* notice is no longer seen as making or breaking: Brantley disliked *Titanic* and *Jekyll and Hyde* and *The Lion King*—but they should care; conversely, he loved *Buried Child* and *The Young Man from Atlanta* and the Siamese twin musical *Side Show*—and nobody came. The theater community itself says that, in terms of box-office, a casual mention on Rosie O'Donnell's daytime TV show is now more important than a *Times* review. Rosie is no "butcher of Broadway," but she's still butcher than the *Times*'s present bloodless line-up. On balance, next time they're looking for a name, the Rosie O'Donnell Theatre seems a better bet.

But, lest we forget, there are other cockades for critics. Who needs statues when, from Sheridan's *The Critic* to Kaufman and Hart's *The Man Who Came to Dinner* (Woollcott) to Tom Stoppard's *The Real Inspector Hound* (in which two critics find themselves caught up in the murder mystery they're reviewing), artists have been so eager in the very art to salute their bêtes noires? The latest, a London hit, can be seen at New York's Primary Stages with its original star, Brian Cox, in a production directed by its young author, Conor McPherson. *St. Nicholas* is a one-man play—a monologue, in fact—about an Irish drama critic who undergoes a kind of breakdown in suburban London. Cox is a British stage actor who's lately been cheerfully supplementing his income in terrible Hollywood action films, usually by playing the maverick cop's irascible superior. This is doubtless excellent training for a character eaten up by self-disgust.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Having seen Cox on stage several times, I've always thought of him as a big actor: it comes as something of a shock to watch the big-budget testosterone movies and see how small he is, at least when standing next to the star. At Primary Stages, he's large again, large as life, entering from the back of the auditorium, telling some poor theatergoer in Row Three to "shove up" and beginning his ferocious comedy perched on her seat. Cox's critic is a big, boozy, shambling hulk of a hack, a kind instantly recognizable to Londoners and Dubliners but perhaps less familiar to New Yorkers, accustomed latterly to more fastidious types. His suit hangs as wearily as his jowls: he seems to have been sleeping in his clothes for the better part of a week. In a few lines, a few gestures, McPherson and Cox have fleshed out a life: a man with a facility for words, who falls into columns and reviews because it's easy, because most of the stuff you have to see is "shite" and you can write your notice during the play and then get rat-arsed (drunk). He's tried writing other things—plays about "handicapped people in love" and "gays and lesbians absolving each other"—but you can tell from that cynical shorthand why they never got farther than a first draft.

One night, Cox's duties take him to *Salome*, an indifferent production save for the eponymous principal, with whom he is much taken, mainly for the way light dances upon her body. Still, he scribbles his review during the first half, files it, and totters off to the pub. Moments later, the entire company comes in and Cox finds himself having a beer with the director—not a talent he respects greatly: "I had no time for him, but I had plenty of time to tell him that, if you know what I mean." Instead, in a fit of madness, even though the first edition is already whirring off the presses, he tells the director the production is a masterpiece. Word spreads through the pub, and soon the cast is all around, applauding his judgment and insight. He is welcomed, embraced. He gives Helen, the Salome with whom he's smitten, a lift home and she kisses him good night. And as he drives away he's suffused by shame, aware that what he really thought of the production is already on its way to Dublin news agents.

So, knowing that the production is due to move to London, so does he—without telling his paper or his family. He feels vaguely that, if he can only reach Helen somehow, he can make amends. Instead, he crumbles. Confident self-loathing is one thing: the natural condition of many critics. But hopelessness is something else. In his usual drunken stupor, he staggers away from the lodgings of Helen and her fellow thespians and into a house of suburban London vampires, who send him into the pubs of Soho every night to procure fresh blood for them.

There are three things to be said for McPherson's lurch from the scabrously observational to the whimsically spectral. First, there is the rather obvious parallel between the critic and his vampire hosts: both are creatures of the night, both bloodsuckers feasting on others, etc. Secondly, it's a deliberate screw-you gesture to audiences, which on the whole like to know what kind of play they're in for and, once that's established, don't like any monkeying around: McPherson, in his three plays and one film to date, has exhibited a wild disdain for these conventions. Thirdly, it's justified: as the flight of fancy gradually returns to ground level, we realize that at last the critic is accomplishing something he's never managed before. All those plays and novels he started and never finished: he had a way with words, he tells us sadly at the beginning, but only as an assessor of other people's stories; he had no stories of his own to tell. Now, as a consequence of his mad pursuit to London, he has.

McPherson is one of the West End's latest stars, on the basis of a trio of plays that are, in essence, monologues—either single monologues, as here, or multiple monologues, as in *This Lime Tree Bower* and his current hit for the Royal Court, *The Weir* (due in New York later this year). Some real-life

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

critics have sniffily queried whether McPherson can write dialogue—you know, two or three people wandering around talking conversationally. But it seems to me he's taking us back to the very roots of drama, to storytelling. He can't be bothered with the pretense of the drawing-room play, because everyone knows it's not a real drawing-room, so why bother? If you've got a really cracking actor like Cox, why not just have him walk out on to an almost bare stage and tell you a first-rate story? For McPherson, that's more real than what he considers the ersatz TV drama that passes for the modern straight play. Between *St. Nicholas* and *The Weir*, he's shown no inclination to "write dialogue," only to expand his use of monologue. In *The Weir*, each of a quartet of habitués at a west-of-Ireland pub whose beer-pump is on the fritz tells a story. In the course of these four monologues, a dramatic arc emerges and a series of relationships between the characters develops. That's perhaps McPherson's greatest strength: he digs deep into his characters' inner life, and, after that, everything else falls into place. In defiance of traditional rules, Cox, addressing us directly and describing his world, is more blazingly vivid than a full-dressed set and cast *showing* it to us.

For all that, there's a strange cultural dislocation in watching Cox—roaring his insults, itemizing his drinks bill, recounting the pools of vomit he's woken up in—on an American stage: it's as impenetrably foreign as performance art drummers from Chad. Whatever else he is, Cox is not a member of the modern American media, whose view of journalism is as a calling somewhere between the Supreme Court and the priesthood. Cox's journalist did not attend a "School of Journalism": journalism just befell him, like some terrible all-engulfing tragedy. After watching the grand panjandrums of the Washington press corps weighed down by their own gravitas, it's rather pleasant to be reminded of a world where people only wind up in journalism because something's gone hideously wrong. Cox is an almost eerie recreation of the middle-aged Anglo-Celtic theater reviewer. A London opening is very different from Broadway nowadays: everyone's in evening dress, except for the couple of dozen shiny-suited deadbeats on the aisle—the worst dressed disfiguring the best seats. As the curtain falls and the ovation commences, the critics scurry up the stalls and into the night to start barking their copy down the telephone. We don't have that kind of first night in New York anymore; indeed, the very concept of a "first night" is dead. New York openings are critic-free zones: reviewers attend previews, because they apparently require several days to hone their dissections to precision. Thus, drama criticism has vastly increased its importance—or, at any rate, more effectively communicated its self-importance.

A few years ago, I was at a dinner party where an earnest Royal Shakespeare Company actor asked me, "Would it help you and your colleagues if you came to rehearsals and worked through the play with us?" Appalled at the prospect but unable to produce any sufficiently noble excuse, I slid under the table and passed out. Seventy years ago, no one minded *Vanity Fair*'s critic, P. G. Wodehouse, reviewing shows by that up-and-coming dramatist, P. G. Wodehouse. E. B. White said accompanying Alexander Woollcott, silk-hatted, cape billowing, to a first night was the equivalent of "being towed in a dinghy behind a large and very expensive yacht." Afterwards, Woollcott would despatch the play to oblivion before the celebrities invited back to his apartment had got through their first drink. "He finished his review in nothing flat," said the lyricist Howard Dietz of one such evening, "and sent Junior, his worshipful mulatto, to the drama desk of the *Times*."

Some of us think there's something to be said for the worshipful mulatto days. The austere detachment of the current generation from all the first night hoopla has removed the sense of occasion from most

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

theater writing—the sense of event, of a huge gamble, a massive roll of the dice on one performance, the sense of the present tense—which, as far as drama's concerned, is the only tense. It's worth noting that the plot of *St. Nicholas* hinges on an encounter which is now impossible in New York: there are no first-night reviewers to bump into the cast in the bar afterwards. A confident critic stalking the lobby at a big opening is part of the drama. For both sides to avoid that contact is, in part, an avoidance of drama. Hence, the tame New York theater of the Nineties.

Yasmina Reza's *Art*, at the Royale, is, like *St. Nicholas*, a one-act and also, like *St. Nicholas*, foreign. It was a hit in Paris in 1995 and then the following year in London, in a fluent translation by Christopher Hampton that nevertheless makes no attempt to disguise the play's Frenchness. *Art* is about friendship, between three men, but the assumptions of that friendship are subtly different from its equivalents in Britain and America. The trio meet for dinner, drinks, movies, and, although they number among them a husband, a divorcé, and a fiancé, the presence of their womenfolk seems peripheral—at least to their displays of intellectual machismo.

What gets the play running is an ingenious kick-start. Serge (Victor Garber) has bought a painting by the celebrated Antrios. He has "been lusting after it for months." It's completely white, except, if you look closely, you can just make out some faint, diagonal white lines. For this all-white painting, Serge paid two hundred thousand francs. "It's a Seventies Antrios," he says proudly. "He's going through a similar phase now. . . ." In other words, there are a lot of other all-white Antrioses out there from the last quarter-century.

Serge's friend Marc (Alan Alda), who has a "pseudo-Flemish painting" in his apartment, considers this Antrios an affront. "You paid two hundred thousand dollars *for this shit?*"

"By whose standards do you say it's shit?" replies Serge, laconically. But to Marc it's not a joke: if Serge really likes this painting, then how can he be the Serge Marc thought he knew so well?

So we're off and running. There are any number of real-life Antrioses, of course: the Kasimir Malevich white-on-white; those late Rothkos, and many other exponents of the Henry Ford school—"You can get it in any color as long as it's black." I see that one critic has sighed that, as a joke about modern art, it's forty years out of date, that we've moved on to newer delights. He sounds a bit like Serge, whose obsession with novelty so infuriates Marc. What's important is not whether or not the all-white Antrios would excite New York gallery owners in 1998 but that it's the perfect painting to hang a drama on. It's anything and nothing—and its pristine blankness makes for a very reliable sight gag every time it's wheeled on or off. Andres Serrano's urine and other lively innovations would be lost on the stage of the Royale, and would demand a different kind of play—not about taste, but decadence.

"It has a white background with a whole range of grays," Serge explains to their other friend Yvan (Alfred Molina). "Marc thinks it's white because he's hung up on its being white." Besides, he's an aeronautical engineer who "takes an incomprehensible pride in running modernism down." Serge, by contrast, is a respected dermatologist. Yvan comes a poor third, having just embarked on a new career in the stationery business and belatedly decided to marry. "I've given in to the logic of events," he says. "Marriage, children, death, stationery." Yvan is "tolerant" because, as Marc says, "he couldn't care less." He agrees with both of them.

As they circle around the painting trying to spot the "shades of gray," they spot instead the shades of gray in their own friendship; the emptiness of the picture seems to have exposed the emptiness of their relationships. They bicker about a thousand things—about Paula (Marc's wife), about Seneca (the noted wordsmith).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Yvan rushes in with a long, volcanic speech that's a tour de force—an explosion of frustration at his parents' and his future in-laws' inability to reach agreement even on the wedding invitation. The arguments build in intensity, as they move from apartment to apartment. In Mark Thompson's spare design—off-white walls and furniture, dark suits for the three actors—each home looks identical, save for the picture: Serge's white Antrios, Marc's "pseudo-Flemish," and Yvan's "motel painting," a cheesy landscape which, in fact, is by his own father.

All three are a joy to watch: Alda gets to play off that slightly irritating quality about him, hectoring the others in terms that are ever more abusive; Garber is also arrogant, but it's a bland, complacent kind; and Molina is deeply insecure, a bewildered loser who struggles to keep up as his two pals trade dazzling quips and he does little more than ping-pong his head back and forth as if he's at Wimbledon—no Englishman has better mastered the Gallic shrug. It's somehow fitting that a play whose design is mostly muted creams and beiges should rely for its physical comedy on a bowl of olives. Serge and Marc have begun pummeling each other and torn Yvan's eardrum in the process, and then all three slump back in their chairs and proceed to devour the olives in silence. Nothing. No words. Just a steady rotation, as Alda, Garber, and Molina select their olive, spit out the stone, go back for more, accompanied by nothing except a crescendo of audience laughter.

And yet it always comes back to the painting—the Antrios that has come between them and set them at each other's throats, and which Serge protectively ushers on and off. *Art* is little more than a sketch, a peg for three crowd pleasers to riff a little on friendship. But Miss Reza has constructed it soundly enough so that we're entitled to expect some kind of resolution. Sure enough, the white-on-white canvas is eventually sullied, in a visual joke the picture has seemed to be inviting ever since it was first glimpsed. *Art* is the sort of play that would be as invisible as the painting without three fine comic performers to oomph it into life. If it never seems quite to merit the claims to universality staked by its title, Miss Reza's play is probably the most laughs you'll get in a hundred minutes on Broadway.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Art

Manet & Monet at the Musée d'Orsay

by Karen Wilkin

The eighth *arrondissement*, wedged between the Seine and the Parc Monceau, traversed by the Champs-Elysées, is chic. Anchored by the Arc de Triomphe at the Etoile at one end and the place de la Concorde at the other, it embraces, as well, a substantial length of the rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré. The eighth is less predominantly residential than the impenetrable sixteenth—Paris's equivalent of the Upper East Side—since it includes, along with its streets of elegant apartments, high-rent office buildings and such public monuments as those overblown Beaux-Arts exhibition halls, the Grand and Petit Palais, plus the Ministry of the Interior, the embassies of Great Britain and the United States, and the Palais de l'Elysée. The rue Royale and the Madeleine are just within the limits of the eighth, but not surprisingly for an *arrondissement* that boasts the avenue Montaigne, with its couturier shops and lavish apartment houses, those twin temples to middle-class consumption, Le Printemps and the Galleries Lafayette, lie outside its borders on the boulevard Haussmann. Most of what you see in the district reminds you of just what is meant by "bon chic, bon genre" and by the Parisians' often-repeated boast "on est moderne ici"—Chanel suits, Hermès ties, and cell phones abound—but there is one corner of the eighth that feels very different from the rest: a small section, between the Gare Saint-Lazare and the place Clichy, sliced off by the railroad tracks.

It's quieter there, more—well, nineteenth century. And it's pleasantly déclassé. The scale is more intimate, even though the plan is as formal as the Champs-Elysées, with its straight central thoroughfare, the rue de Saint-Pétersbourg (known until recently as rue de Leningrad but now back to its original name), and its bouquets of streets radiating from a series of *places*. The wide railroad cut, far below street level, acts like a moat, separating the area from the rest of the *arrondissement* and making it seem more naturally connected to the adjacent Batignolles district and to nearby Montmartre, with its connotations of sleaze and bohemianism, than to the high-end tidiness of the rest of the eighth. It's a nondescript part of Paris, very much off the usual tourist beat, but it all seems curiously familiar: the silhouette of the sheds of the Gare Saint-Lazare, the massive steel girders along the sunken railroad tracks, the tapering building and angled streets of the place de Dublin with its eight narrow corners.

The district is, of course, the *quartier d'Europe*, so called because of its street names, which pay tribute to such places as Moscow, Turin, Berne, Florence, and Liège, and because of the immense starfish-shaped bridge, the Pont de l'Europe, that crosses the vast river of tracks leading to the Gare Saint-Lazare. Tourists (apart from obsessed art historians) rarely visit it, but by rights it should be a place of pilgrimage. The *quartier de l'Europe* was Edouard Manet's home

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

turf. He lived in the neighborhood and worked in a studio overlooking the Pont de l'Europe from the early 1870s until his death in 1883, and, throughout the 1860s, he lived and worked only a short distance away, on the edge of the district. In the 1870s, Claude Monet spent a considerable amount of time in the area. The Impressionists' affluent friend, collector, and occasional colleague Gustave Caillebotte lived and worked there, as did many of the writers close to the Impressionists, including Stéphane Mallarmé. The artists' connection with the area, including the district of Les Batignolles—which gives its name to the boulevard that forms the northern boundary of the neighborhood—is commemorated in Henri Fantin-Latour's famous group portrait of the Impressionist circle, *Un Atelier aux Batignolles* (1870, Musée d'Orsay, Paris). The picture shows Manet painting a portrait of the critic Zacharie Astruc, watched by friends who include Monet, Emile Zola, Auguste Renoir, and Frédéric Bazille.

If the *quartier de l'Europe* itself seems familiar, it is because it is the subject, both directly and indirectly, of many of these artists' best-known (and often best) works. It figures in Manet's superb *Le Chemin de fer* (1872–73, National Gallery of Art, Washington), also known as *Gare Saint-Lazare*, that extraordinary image of a seated woman with a sleeping lapdog and a bare-armed little girl with her back to us, both of them squeezed toward the viewer's space by the railings surrounding the chasm of tracks; the Pont de l'Europe itself is visible on the right side of the picture. The *quartier* is the unifying thread in Monet's first series, his 1877 paintings of the platforms, tracks, and roofs of the Gare Saint-Lazare, a group of remarkable images, embodiments of "on est moderne ici" in nineteenth-century terms, celebrating the allure of the machine in general, and steam engines in particular. The neighborhood plays a leading role, too, in Caillebotte's "snapshot" views of people on the Pont de l'Europe or crossing a rain-swept place de Dublin.

Many of the particulars of the urban fabric that these artists responded to are still visible in the *quartier*. Apart from the absence of cobblestone pavement, the place de Dublin still appears much as it did for Caillebotte in his 1877 painting *Rue de Paris: temps de pluie* (Art Institute of Chicago). The Gare Saint-Lazare, despite inevitable insertions responding to the demands of late twentieth-century life, is still a lively, much-used, functioning railroad station, and if the vaporous atmosphere generated by the steam engines has vanished in an age of electrification, the building itself, with its great skylighted sheds over the platforms, looks startlingly as it did when Monet painted it.

When Monet, Manet, and their colleagues lived in the *quartier*, however, it was a relatively new part of town. Development of what had been a zone chiefly of market gardens began in the first part of the nineteenth century, just before the first railroad station in Paris was constructed, near the present Gare Saint-Lazare, in 1835. The real character of the neighborhood, which derives from its solid, uniform buildings and its distinctive layout of streets, was determined much later. The Pont de l'Europe didn't take its present form, radiating from the place de l'Europe, high above the mass of railroad tracks, until 1868, while the buildings around it were constructed only in the early 1870s, not long before Manet moved into his studio at 4, rue de Saint-Pétersbourg, within sight of the bridge.

The *quartier*'s defining features—the wide, symmetrical "floating" *place*, the angled spans of the bridge, the solemn apartment houses with their mansards and their rows of ample windows and iron railings—reflect the influence of the ideas of the Baron Haussmann, the Robert Moses of the nineteenth century. His conception of up-to-date urban amenity was implemented in the 1850s plan for the modernization of medieval Paris, a staggeringly ambitious project that turned much of the city into a series of gigantic building sites for decades and largely created the Paris we

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

know today. Manet's building, which appears in the background of *Le Chemin de fer*, is still there, although, strangely, there is no plaque commemorating the painter's tenure; the viewpoint of the painting has been altered by the construction of a large, less-than-distinguished twentieth-century bureaucratic edifice opposite number 4 and the simplification of the once-massive girders of the Pont de l'Europe.

A century or so ago, the neighborhood was a little raw, a new place, with a very diverse population. Poised somewhat ambiguously at the edge of the city, between the newly modernized center and the old neighborhoods that survived beyond the peripheral boulevards, it was a short walk from the *grands boulevards* recently created by Haussmann's sweeping projects, but it overlooked the Butte Montmartre, with its windmills; not far from the once-notorious slums of Petite Pologne, the *quartier* contained two modern-day marvels, the spectacular engineering of the Pont de l'Europe and the Gare Saint-Lazare itself, a monument to the last word in state-of-the-art transportation, the railroad. The *quartier de l'Europe* was, in short, a paradigm of modern Paris; the forward-looking young artists who called it home, and who had consciously dedicated themselves to the interpretation of modern life, included in their work recognizable references to their neighborhood as a sign of both their commitment to the present, with all its irregularities and "unaesthetic" components, and their rejection of the past, with its Academy-sanctioned conventions.

But it was more than the appearances of the *quartier* that engaged the painters who lived and worked there in the 1870s. For Manet, in particular, who was the most firmly entrenched inhabitant, the life of the neighborhood was bound up with every part of his existence. He has been described as "the most Parisian of artists," a connoisseur of street life who got to know every corner and every aspect of his *quartier* over the years—"its colors, its nuances, its sounds, its smells," as the Impressionist scholar Juliet Wilson-Bareau has put it—and it is not altogether far-fetched to find evidence of that intimate knowledge in his art. A reluctant modernist in many respects, Manet produced a large number of pictures, especially in the first years of his career, that seem to look back to the old masters he admired—Velázquez, Goya, Titian, and Rubens, for example—as much as they affirm the present or point to the future. (This is, of course, a gross over-simplification that underestimates the complexity of what is meant by Manet's modernism.) But there are also many important Manets from the 1860s and 1870s that grapple directly with the notion of modern life, pictures that, however conceived or achieved, seem directly provoked by what the artist saw in the streets of his *quartier* or on the nearby boulevards, with their busy cafés. Like Charles Baudelaire's *flâneur*, whose reason for being was to observe actively the spectacle of modern life, Manet seems, in pictures of this type, to bear witness to apparently inconsequential fragments of modern existence—a street singer leaving a café, a woman at a café table, an old soldier passing by—and to treat them, on canvas, with the solemnity and intensity of old-master painting. In such pictures, Manet becomes, among other things, the *artiste-flâneur* of the *quartier de l'Europe*.

The subtle and complex relationship of Manet and his fellow painters, especially Monet and Caillebotte, to the district they inhabited is the subject of a fascinating, quirky exhibition, "Manet, Monet, and the Gare Saint-Lazare,"[1] on view this spring in Paris at the Musée d'Orsay (a short Métro

1 "Manet, Monet, and the Gare Saint-Lazare" opened at the Musée d'Orsay, Paris, on February 12, 1998, and remains on view through May 17. The exhibition will reopen at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, on June 14, 1998, and remain on view there through September 20. A catalogue of the exhibition, by Juliet Wilson-Bareau, has been published by Yale University Press (210 pages, $45; $24.95 paper).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ride from the "Europe" stop), and to be seen at the National Gallery, Washington, all summer. The show's organizers take a wonderfully flexible and wide-ranging approach to their theme. Threads of association are unravelled and followed to their ends. Victorine Meurent, for example, was Manet's favorite model in the early part of his career. Her presence in *Le Chemin de fer* (her last appearance in his art) is supplemented by several other key images of the young woman, some admittedly more obviously related than others to the ostensible subject of the exhibition, but all welcome additions to any group of works from the period. Cynics might observe that a show entitled "Manet, Monet, and the Gare Saint-Lazare" simply provides a splendid excuse for bringing together some extraordinary pictures—and, as an added benefit to French audiences, a great many of them from collections outside of France—but the exhibition is anything but another Impressionist crowd pleaser.

The show is worth seeing, of course, simply for its abundant aesthetic pleasures. The selection of Manets alone is like a well-chosen mini-retrospective, ranging from the Boston Museum of Fine Art's wonderful 1862 portrait of Victorine Meurent, Manet's homage to the period's newly rediscovered master, Vermeer; to the marvelous *Bal masqué à l'Opéra* (1873, National Gallery of Art, Washington), with its rows of black silk opera hats and complicated social transactions; to the J. Paul Getty Museum's poignant, ironic 1878 image of a crippled veteran on the rue Moisner decorated with patriotic flags.

The selection of Monets includes the majority of his views of the Gare Saint-Lazare, seen from the tracks or from just inside the steel and glass shed, pictures that hinge on the powerful contrast of brutal engines and insubstantial clouds of steam. The most remarkable of these, last seen at the Art Institute of Chicago's Monet retrospective in 1995, is probably *La Gare Saint-Lazare: les signaux* (1877, Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum, Hannover), an astonishing composition in which the hard-edged discs of the railroad signals hover above a rapidly scribbled swirl of blue and rose clouds of steam, with scrolled white edges, while the sketchy, angular drawing of the tracks and buildings provides contrast. The flat, opaque circle of the largest signal, placed dead center and thickly painted, is so insistent that it turns the picture into a near-abstraction.

The Fantin group portrait is there, and so is what is probably Caillebotte's strongest painting of the Pont de l'Europe (c. 1876–1880, Kimbell Museum, Fort Worth)—the one in which the overscaled girders are parallel to the surface of the canvas and all but fill the picture. All of these delights are accompanied by seldom-seen studies, drawings, notebook sketches, and the like, many from private collections or rarely exhibited because of the fragility of works on paper. In this category are two vivid little full-length portraits of Manet by Degas, a drawing from the Musée d'Orsay and an etching from the print collection of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, both from about 1866–68, that by themselves nearly provide justification for seeing the show.

Good as the pictures in the exhibition are, they have been assembled not only for their intrinsic merits, but also as part of an intelligent, provocative effort to discover some of the meanings they had in their own day. Whatever else it offers, the show is an attempt to understand more fully the context, both physical and metaphysical, in which these works were produced. The exhibition addresses thought-provoking issues of urbanism, politics, social attitudes, artists' intentions, and critical responses of the period, and in doing so it raises absorbing questions about the meaning of modernity itself. What is remarkable is that this is accomplished without polemics, ideology, or over-abundant texts. Instead, we are presented with persuasive, interesting visual evidence that tells the story: maps of Paris before and after Haussmann's moderniza-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion program, including one of his own watercolor street plans; prints and drawings documenting the rigors of the Franco-Prussian war and the upheavals of the Commune; satirical cartoons that document how the paintings in the exhibition were received when they were first exhibited, and so on. Subtle suggestions are made without hammering the issue home with acres of wall text. In a section on "War and Peace," exploring images of the Franco-Prussian war, the siege of Paris, and the bitterly cold winter of 1870–71, we come upon a study for Pierre Puvis de Chavannes's well-known *L'Espérance* (1871–72, Musée d'Orsay, Paris). In it, a young woman is seated against a war-ravaged landscape, holding a green shoot at arm's length. Suddenly, the outstretched arm of the little girl in Manet's *Le Chemin de fer* begins to look like a reprisal —or a revision—of the extended arm of Puvis's allegorical figure, turning Manet's apparently naturalistic slice of modern life into a subtle affirmation of the pleasures of normalcy after the deprivations and horrors of war.

Similarly, the context changes our reading of a vigorously brushed little painting by Berthe Morisot, Manet's close friend and sister-in-law, of her sister and her sister's child gazing over Paris from a balcony. It's a modest, charming picture that, while wholly anecdotal and informally organized, nevertheless seems to anticipate, in more naturalistic terms, Manet's confrontational image of the seated woman and the standing, absorbed child at the edge of the Pont de l'Europe embankment (the Morisot, painted in 1871–72, does predate the Manet by about a year). Detailed discussion in the catalogue text confirms these relationships, but the exhibition trusts the works of art and the supporting visual material to make the connections for an alert viewer.

Some of the most ambitious paintings in the show are obviously included to illustrate a point. Manet's portraits of Mallarmé and Morisot, for example, seem to be there mainly in relation to his friendships. The former is a fine example of Manet's informal, intimate images of his friends from the mid 1870s. The latter, *Berthe Morisot à l'éventail* (1872, Musée d'Orsay, Paris), showing the seated painter, ankles coquettishly displayed, peering through a fan held high in front of her face, is a little masterpiece. Its subtle harmony of blacks and browns is held together by boldly disposed, frontal rectangular shapes and unexpected "rhymes," like that of the gold spindles of the chair back and the rapidly drawn sticks of the fan.

Other important issues are addressed by two justly celebrated Manets of standing figures, the Metropolitan's 1866 *Woman with a Parrot*—yet another image of Victorine Meurent, here in a long, pink silk peignoir—and the Stockholm Nationalmuseum's stylish portrait of the actress Ellen Andrée in elegant black, painted in Manet's rue de Saint-Pétersbourg studio in 1874–75. The two canvases, hung not side by side but in useful proximity, are clearly intended to demonstrate Manet's evolving ways of handling paint and his changing conception of modern womanhood. Because of their complicated exhibition histories, they also attest to alterations in how he wished to present himself to the Parisian art world. Happily, none of this overwhelms the pictures themselves. It simply deepens the understanding of what you are looking at—if you pay attention. It may even make you look at well-known, favorite pictures in new ways.

Even if you are less than enthralled by the history of Parisian urbanism, the show can be enjoyed simply because of the high level of the works, both familiar and unfamiliar, that have been included. But if you *do* pay attention to the subtext, the exhibition offers additional rewards. It's not the first time Impressionist painting has been interrogated in this way. Robert L. Herbert has written extensively and illuminatingly about the shared cultural assumptions and social values embodied in the images of urban life created by Degas, Manet, Monet, and Morisot, among others. Theodore Reff ex-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

plored Manet's responses to his native city in an engaging exhibition, "Manet and Modern Paris," at the National Gallery, Washington, in 1982. The present exhibition continues and, in some respects, expands this line of inquiry.

The catalogue that accompanies "Manet, Monet, and the Gare Saint-Lazare" is full of fascinating information, with chapters dealing with Manet and the history of *Le Chemin de fer*; with Caillebotte and Manet and the Paris of Haussmann; with the urban history of the *quartier de l'Europe*, the Pont de l'Europe, and the Gare Saint-Lazare; with Manet's friendship with Mallarmé, and more. There's no index, at least in the French version, which is frustrating and makes the illustrations hard to locate, especially as they are not cross-indexed with the list of exhibited works. In compensation, the reproductions themselves are less awful than usual, and there is a good deal of interesting documentary material—period photographs and the like—not included in the exhibition. All in all, it's a good read. Herbert's book is more penetrating and Meyer Schapiro's recently published lifetime's ruminations on Impressionism more penetrating still, but the catalogue of "Manet, Monet, and the Gare Saint-Lazare" is a nice addition to the Impressionism shelf. And the exhibition itself offers both an exhilarating collection of paintings and drawings for our delectation and a fresh way of thinking about even the most familiar of them.

It might even make the *quartier de l'Europe* into a tourist destination, although that seems a little fanciful. And not just tourists need to be reminded of where it is. At a preview of the show, while I was studying one of Haussmann's maps, I overheard a couple puzzling, in impeccable Parisian accents, over the location of the Pont de l'Europe. "It crosses the Seine, somewhere, I imagine," monsieur suggested. But where? Since I had a conspicuously labeled Musée d'Orsay visitor's badge clipped to my lapel, and I was looking closely and taking notes, he decided I might be able to help. "Do you know where it is?" he asked. I was surprised, since they weren't dressed in the "bon chic, bon genre" mode I would have associated with such parochialism, but rather in official "intellectual" uniforms of leather jacket and pullover (him) and short quilted Italian raincoat, well-worn, with enormous scarf (her). "Behind the Gare Saint-Lazare, crossing the tracks," I explained and pointed. They leaned in and studied the map for a long time. "Ah!" said madame, at last. "Ça s'explique."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Robert Delaunay at the Guggenheim

by Mario Naves

"Been there, done that" may or may not be the adage that best summarizes the climate of cultural life in the waning days of the 1990s. It does, however, capture the ennui felt by many who concern themselves with the world of contemporary art. As hackneyed as it has become to link events to the turn of the millennium, such a moment does lend itself to historical overview. Given the status quo in the art world, how could one not be glum? As artists endeavor to trample aesthetic boundaries which have long ceased to matter, the illusion of a viable avant-garde is nevertheless maintained. Such a pursuit is a self-perpetuated scam and old news. Yet the need to grasp on to an avant-garde is a vestige, however diminished, of the original modernist impulse. "Shock" and "innovation" have come down to us—and not without reason—as attributes of the twentieth-century artist. But does anyone believe that what is deemed shocking and innovative today constitutes a revitalization of art?

Those wanting to experience the electricity that results when a genuine shift in artistic practice occurs are referred to the exhibition "Visions of Paris: Robert Delaunay's Series" at the Guggenheim.[1] In Delaunay's paintings, it is possible to feel the unruly, trailblazing spirit of the avant-garde. One may justifiably wonder whether it is possible fully to appreciate the freshness these paintings had for someone seeing them in 1910. After all, Delaunay's work has been, as Auden put it, "tidied into history." Yet viewers with an eye for painting will find them evocative of an era when radical art could be created and discussed without aspersion. This aura of daring is due, in part, to the associations we bring to prewar Paris, a city Delaunay depicts here as both fractured and immovable. But it is the pulse of the paintings themselves that recalls the heady atmosphere of early modernism. They put us in touch with a world whose possibilities were boundless and bewildering.

Or so it seemed. That this world was short-lived—and, in retrospect, so optimistic as to be naïve—should not put us off the rigorous pleasures found in Delaunay's art. "Visions of Paris" focuses on five years of the artist's development, from 1909–1914. It is divided into four sections, each concentrating on a particular body of work: paintings depicting the church of Saint-Séverin, views of Paris as seen through a window, the Eiffel Tower, and, finally, the "Windows" series. The exhibition stresses

1 "Visions of Paris: Robert Delaunay's Series" opened at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, on February 27, 1998, and remains on view through May 24. The exhibition was first seen at the Deutsche Guggenheim Berlin (November 7, 1997–January 4, 1998). A catalogue of the exhibition, with an essay by Matthew Drutt, has been published by the Guggenheim Museum (147 pages, $45; $24.95 paper).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Delaunay's role as a pioneering modernist. One is led in a straight line from the self-described "destructive" period to the all-over synergies of Delaunay's near-abstractions. We see him take apart the art of painting and put it back together again. It's an exciting trip. Yet the exhibit's dialectical approach is constricting. By the time we reach *A Window, Study for Three Windows* (1912), the final painting in the show, we want to see where Delaunay will go with his experiments in color. It doesn't happen. Instead, Delaunay the innovator is given precedence over Delaunay the artist. The former should not be dismissed, for his influence was crucial to many artists, among them Kandinsky, Chagall, and Klee. But "Visions of Paris" stops short of a full account of the artist's work.

If the show posits Delaunay as a hit-and-run innovator, it also reveals a tenaciously inquisitive painter. Delaunay's was an intellect primed for the uncertainties and pace of the twentieth century. Like many of his generation, he worked his way swiftly through several stylistic approaches. His knack for penetrating and acting upon the revolutionary changes in art, whether it be pointillism or Cubism, is astonishing. Even when he's dismantling—or, rather, restructuring—pictorial conventions, his grip is sure. These are ferociously lucid paintings and they register the foment of the era. Even the work of the greater artist Fernand Léger, currently the subject of a retrospective at MOMA, can't match Delaunay's paintings for conveying their historical moment. Léger's gusto, albeit refracted in the power of the machine, is part and parcel of the man. Delaunay, in contrast, was less a personality than a conduit through which the modern era passed. The work is piercing, but distant. Delaunay inspires respect, not passion.

The artist that emerges from "Visions of Paris" is a problem solver, not a fully rounded painter. This distinction should not be taken as derisive: as a problem solver, Delaunay was brilliant. Think of him as an investigator of form, confident and focused. The Saint-Severin paintings, for example, are subtle and dramatic exercises in the reordering of pictorial structure. Delaunay thrusts the space of the painting forward while depicting the Gothic church's receding interior. They are strange paintings, hypnotic in their distortions. In the Eiffel Tower series, the title structure is simultaneously celebrated and razed; Delaunay was, one feels, taken by the spectacle of the tower's architectural sweep, but skeptical of its pretensions. His splintered spaces acquire a jagged sculptural presence. These (in the artist's words) "visions of catastrophic insight" smack of, if not sarcasm, then irony. "This is your icon of modernity?" Delaunay asks as he expertly shuffles the tower into the ether. Today the paintings may strike us as a mite dated, but they do retain their brawn some ninety years on. The hulking *Red Eiffel Tower* (1911–12), for instance, has the propulsive muscle of a power forward in the N.B.A.

The Eiffel Tower paintings are the best known of Delaunay's works, and there is much about them that is definitive, both iconographically and formally. But it is the City series that comprises his strongest efforts. Here Delaunay paints Paris as seen from a window, complete with curtains that "frame" the vista. The architecture of the city is worked into an irregular grid delineated by pointillist brush strokes. The grid tempers Delaunay's compositions, but the space of the paintings nevertheless shifts, condenses, expands, and tilts, sometimes precariously. The underlying geometry of Paris isn't revealed so much as it is agitated, all but losing its foundations. Looking at the tousled buildings of *The City No. 2* (1910), we can understand why Delaunay was dubbed, by one critic, as "the first Expressionist." Yet there isn't an iota of angst to be found in the paintings; this is an artist preoccupied with rhythm and space, not navel gazing. In the most thrilling (and complex) of the series, *The Window on the City No. 3* (1911–12), Paris is broken up into a kaleidoscopic field of pattern. The painting

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

flickers and blurs, a light-filled mosaic with an almost cinematic cadence. Steadfast and unstoppable, *The Window on the City No. 3* is a masterpiece. If it isn't one of the hallmarks of twentieth-century art, then it should be.

The largest part of "Visions of Paris" is given over to the Windows paintings. Delaunay described this phase of his work as "constructive" and, after the turbulence of the earlier work, they suggest a grand synthesis. Bordering on abstraction, the Windows series remains tethered to (and anchored by) the slope of the Eiffel Tower. It is with this series that Delaunay's use of vibrant color comes to the fore, as does the notion of "simultaneity." In his essay "Light," Delaunay wrote that simultaneity was "the living movement of the world" and "the color rhythms which gave birth to Man's sight." Predicated in the color theories of Michel Eugène Chevreul and the spatial interrogations of Cubism, simultaneity connoted (broadly speaking) the dissolution of particular experience into a harmonic, universal rapport. Exemplary and ambitious goals, yet something vital was lost in Delaunay's "representative harmony." In a letter to Kandinsky, Franc Marc wrote that Delaunay "relies too much on complementary colors and prism effects; but his things are definitely talented and . . . full of great intentions." He's right: the Windows are fine paintings, but somewhat pat. They are less a synthesis of Delaunay's ambitions than a compromising of them.

The one glorious exception is *Windows in Three Parts* (1912), a painting that has the sparkling translucency of a stained-glass window. Here Paris unfolds like an intricate piece of origami, its rhythms as orchestrated and organic as nature itself. The conceit of simultaneity sounds trite on paper, but with *Windows in Three Parts* it makes beautiful sense. That is as it should be. But is "Visions of Paris" the best way to present Delaunay? While succinctness is a virtue, particularly in an age of obfuscation, I wish that "Visions of Paris" were less streamlined and more inclusive—in other words, a full-scale retrospective. Admittedly, the name "Delaunay" does not have the marquee value of a Picasso or a Matisse. We can hope, however, that some intrepid curator will have the gumption to follow through on this exhibition's trial run. Such an exhibition may simply confirm that Delaunay was little more than an accomplished and important technician. Or it may reveal something more. In the meantime, devotees of twentieth-century painting have an exhibition that is well worth repeated visits.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The media

Nonpartisan review

by James Bowman

Journalism, like epic poetry, is essentially the artful management of cliché, and the art of spin, as the Clinton operation realizes, lies in constantly coming up with new (and, of course, self-serving) clichés with which to feed the journalistic beast. Thus it was that the idea that Kenneth Starr, the independent counsel in the Whitewater case, was "out of control" or "out of bounds" or had "overstepped his bounds" or "overstepped his authority" seemed to occur to every TV news anchor and journalist in the country more or less simultaneously at the begining of March. It was at about the same time that Starr issued a subpoena to Sidney Blumenthal, sometime journalist and all-time Clinton champion, and the "journalistic community" seemed to feel with equal simultaneity the "chilling effect" on their first amendment freedoms.

I leave it to more fastidious critics than myself to criticize the media for their reliance on cliché. The formulaic style has its charms for me both in Homer and on the nightly news. Nor am I disposed to be unduly harsh on them for the partisanship which makes them so much more eager to retail Democratic clichés than Republican ones. "Party" and "partisan" are not dirty words in my book. But I confess it is exasperating when journalists allow their vanity to be flattered by partisan cliché-mongers into thinking that, like the sedulous spinners but unlike their partisan opponents, they themselves are *not* partisans. James Carville seems to have been the first, though he is certainly not the last among the Clintonites, to realize the powerful negative charge that the word "partisan" has for the allegedly nonpartisan press—as if being partisan precluded being fair.

Cleverer journalists may recognize that they are being used, but they don't seem to be able to do anything much about it. One way of buying into the White House strategy while still preserving the appearance of journalistic independence was suggested by the headline in *The New York Times* of March 2: "White House's All-Out Attack on Starr Is Paying Off—With His Help." That is to say, "Starr's errors"—presumably his stepping out of bounds—"have given the White House some ammunition." On the same day, *The Washington Post* demonstrated *its* way of yielding to the White House spin while not seeming to do so. It ran a Style section piece by Sue Anne Pressley headed: "The Roots of Ken Starr's Morality Plays: Independent Counsel Molded by Conservative Texas Upbringing." In other words, he's a religious nut, and that's why he continues to torment naughty Bill Clinton.

And then, of course, there is that great journalistic favorite, the "plague o' both your houses" approach, which was assayed by the *Post*'s Howard Kurtz in that day's Media Notes column:

> Imagine having visited the moon for the last six weeks and returning to pick up the papers.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> Clinton's people are accusing Starr's people of leaking. Starr's folks are accusing Clinton's folks of leaking and blaming the prosecutors for the leaks. White House aides say the "out-of-control" Starr is trampling their First Amendment right to make him look bad. Starr says the administration is burying him under an "avalanche of lies." What sane person can follow it all?

And I thought I was sane! But the controversy is only hard to follow if, like most journalists, you really, really want to believe in the smokescreen of lies thrown up by the White House. Any fair-minded partisan must have seen long before Kathleen Willey appeared on "60 Minutes" that Clinton was guilty as sin. But pretending to be confused, like Howard Kurtz, was a good way to prolong the phase of denial. So was closing your eyes to the fact that Starr's skirting of the boundaries was closely watched every step of the way by the judges from whom he had to request every subpoena, and by Clinton's own attorney general. He could not be "out of control" unless the system itself was, and that would have been a much more difficult argument to make.

All this is just to make the point that partisanship is natural, and that the journalistic pretense of nonpartisanship makes it very easy for someone who knows how to work on this pretense to use it for his own purposes. A good example came with the treatment afforded David Brock, the author of the original "Troopergate" story in *The American Spectator* which appeared in December of 1993, when he wrote a public "apology" to President Clinton in this month's *Esquire*. On this, Howard Kurtz wrote that "Brock has always described himself as a conservative who labors under the strictest journalistic standards. Perhaps his most damaging admission is that, as his worst critics charged, his work was politically motivated."

> In describing "my ransacking of your personal life," Brock tells Clinton in Esquire, "there was an open political agenda at work as well, which must have colored my judgment at least at the margins. . . . I did regard you, the first Democratic president in my adult life, as an ideological threat.
>
> Brock also pleads guilty to "hypocrisy" for having argued, in his book about Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill, that "sexual witch-hunts" should not be used for partisan advantage, only to leap into the very same bog himself.
>
> But that, Brock said yesterday, is history. "I've abandoned that form of journalism," he said.

The effect of this, as surely Brock must have realized, is to play into the media's illusion that only right-wing partisans and not they themselves can be "politically motivated." Nor did it occur to any of the nonpartisan commentators whose ranks Brock was now humbly seeking to join to ask who—the troopers or David Brock—made more money and got more career-advancing publicity out of the Troopergate story, and what that tells us about Brock's transparently despicable and self-serving charge that the troopers were "greedy" and had "slimy motives." Nor was it pointed out that Brock's next project is an expanded version of the "Confessions of a Right-Wing Hit Man" that he wrote for *Esquire*, or that he knew that this letter would get him the kind of publicity that even George Stephanopoulos—who is also writing a book and whose ever-so-gingerly self-distancing from Clinton early in the scandal attracted brief attention—could only dream of.

Brock's letter cleverly played not only on the press's self-created myth of its own nonpartisanship but also on its self-importance, its love of the agonized why-oh-why?, and its belief that what it does must have profound consequences for the future of the Republic: "If we continue down this path," wrote Brock, "we can and will destroy everyone in public life." The claim would be a ludicrous one even if it did not come from a man who won his place in the public eye for retailing salacious details

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

about the president's sexual habits—and adduced high-minded principles as his reason for doing so. For the media to pretend that the story of Brock's apology lay in the shocking news that a journalist had confessed to having "political motivations," rather than that one partisan had betrayed his side by going over (while he still had something of value to bring with him) to the other lot of partisans, was idiotic but entirely predictable given their self-conceit.

David Brock's public confession of the sin of partisanship came just too late for consideration by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in his piece for *The New Yorker* called "The End of Loyalty," but it would have been very interesting to see how Gates would have treated Brock, given his rediscovery of the virtue of loyalty just in time for it to be of service to Clinton. Suddenly, Gates seems to have discovered that the hero of the Watergate affair was not a rat like Jeb Stuart Magruder or John Dean but the old tape-eraser Rose Mary Woods herself! Well, why not? I, too, admire Miss Woods and wish that all secretaries, presidential and otherwise, to say nothing of all wives and mistresses, were just like her. All, that is, except for the secretaries, wives and mistresses of "the big jerk" in the White House!

But then I'm a partisan. Actually, as between Clinton and David Brock, I would vote for Clinton as being the more honorable, and probably the more fun to be with, too. That's what makes Gates's piece so curious. For its occasion is supposed to be the general weakness of the ties of personal loyalty given the shocking disloyalty of Clinton's team by the fondly remembered standards of Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon. But his examples of disloyalty in the Clinton White House are all drawn from outside it—from ex-Clintonites like Stephanopoulos, Leon Panetta, and Dick Morris, or Vernon Jordan who once in the midst of an apparently loyal attachment to the president was rumored to have leaked some information protective of himself but "potentially harmful to the President." This does not sound to me like "a veritable 'La ronde' of betrayal."

On the contrary, at the time of writing the absolute solidarity of the president's men (and, of course, women) in continuing to defend a position that grows more and more absurd by the day is remarkable. Ann Lewis or Bob Bennett (to say nothing of Susan McDougal) could have taken Rose Mary Wood's correspondence course. Why then is Gates shaking his head and clucking his tongue about the end of loyalty? Could it be because the vital link in the chain of Clinton defenders is likely to be his secretary Betty Currie—who, unlike her predecessor, says Gates, "is believed to have decided to place her obligation to the truth above personal fealty"? But we don't know that. Could Henry Louis be sending a message to Betty to earn his high opinion by aspiring to be another Rose Mary Woods? Just an idea.

But the theme of loyalty does give Gates a chance to quote a lot of people, including Jack Valenti and Paul Begala, who have lectured the president's men on the underappreciated virtue of loyalty—just in case, perhaps, someone else out there, someone on the president's side, is thinking of doing a Brock and founding his career on a betrayal. It is not the least of the ironies of this presidential scandal that it has induced feminists to defend a divorce between the personal and the political and someone like Gates to wax nostalgic about an old-fashioned virtue which is now allegedly out of date. "Loyalty is, in essence, a premodern virtue," he writes—as if all virtues were not premodern. "As such, it is understood—even by those who profess devotion to it—to be one of those things we've inherited and must make do with, like a grandmother's quilt, or the national debt. Its natural context is a social world of reciprocal dependencies: lords and vassals, lieges and subjects."

Still, as we make do with it, we realize that we have a more sophisticated understanding

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

than we knew of what this "anachronistic" virtue is about. Gates quotes Colin Powell, for example:

> In the military . . . loyalty remains a very important and vital culture—loyalty to your superiors, loyalty to your subordinates, loyalty also to your contemporaries, to your buddies. Loyalty, trust, character are all mixed together. We are sometimes considered old-fashioned, and we are sometimes considered anachronistic.

Jack Valenti, who sees himself as a creature of Lyndon Johnson, says to George Stephanopoulos that he ought to damn well recognize that he is the creature of Bill Clinton: "You owe this man who has brought you to the klieg lights, where everybody thinks you're terrific only because you bask in his reflected glory. . . . You owe him loyalty." And "another Clinton aide" makes a distinction between Stephanopoulos and Panetta on the grounds that "Stephanopoulos was made by Clinton" but Panetta, as a prominent former congressman, was not, "so the burden of loyalty did not apply to him equally." But Gates notes that Stephanopoulos could claim that Clinton had been disloyal to him by appointing David Gergen and Dick Morris over his head, and he cites Lani Guinier's treatment ("I felt kicked in the teeth," she says) as another example.

> But loyalty is essentially premodern for a larger and simpler reason: it bespeaks partiality, and our modernity was ushered in by a trumpet voluntary of impartial principles, rights, abstractions. Rather as winding cow paths gave way to macadamized gridirons, the old codes of duty and honor gave way to the cool calculus of moral rationalism. This is the Enlightenment's gift to us, and its curse. Take William Godwin—please. In his "Enquiry Concerning Political Justice" (1793) he conjures up a situation where you are able to rescue only one person from a burning house: do you save your mother or Archbishop Fenelon? For Godwin, it's an easy call: you go for the Archbishop, since he has the greater social contribution to make. . . . "What magic is in the pronoun 'my' that should justify us in overturning the decisions of impartial truth?" Godwin demands.

It is an impressive rediscovery in the last decade of the twentieth century that the "moral modernizers," among whose critics Gates has never hitherto been known to have been numbered, might have missed something—to wit, "the magic of the pronoun 'my.'"

Now he seeks new moral authorities: "Be true to your school, the Beach Boys urged, but to a new generation of post-Watergate idealists the only imperative was to do the right thing: to be a citizen of the world, to be honest, fair-minded, and principled. Chances were, your school was telling you the same thing." In this respect he cites the late Lawrence Kohlberg of Harvard whose "six-stage theory of moral development" has been immensely influential since the 1970s.

> The early stages—Stages 1 and 2—characterize the child who obeys authority to avoid punishment or gain some reward. Stage 3, still a fairly backward one, encompasses attributes such as loyalty, trust, and gratitude. Stage 4 exhibits respect for law and order; at Stage 5 you come to respect the social contract and individual rights. (According to Kohlberg, this is the official morality of the United States government, though only twenty per cent of Americans will ever achieve this level of moral maturity.) The highest stage, Stage 6, is a moral promised land inhabited by the likes of Socrates, Lincoln, and Gandhi; it's a stage where the enlightened few pursue justice and righteousness as determined by a self-chosen but uniform set of principles.

If Gandhi is an example of Stage 6, then G. Gordon Liddy is Gates's example of Stage 3—although Liddy's "perspective on loyalty has the compounding irony that his own example contributed to its discredit: after all, if loyalty looks like Liddy, who needs

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it?" But even Gates can feel, now, a touch of admiration for Liddy's "nostalgia for what he regards as an increasingly endangered quality."

And guess who turns up in Gates's cast of characters as the nerdy Stage 6 type, the creep who would rescue an archbishop from a burning building before his own mother?

> For the people who remain, there is a different set of prizes and penalties. These are times when Special Prosecutor Kenneth Starr, as if seeking to criminalize spinning, feels free to issue a summons to Sidney Blumenthal, an adviser to the president and an aggressive Clinton loyalist. "Loyalty has become illegal," Dick Morris declares flatly.

O tempora! O mores! But of course loyalty to a partner in crime, including the crime of suborning perjury, has always been illegal. So has obstructing justice. But Gates is going to get all the mileage he can out of his wistful lament for vanished loyalty—so long as it helps Clinton.

And thus Gates's claim that the sense of personal loyalty is dissipating and disappearing from the world is undercut by his own demonstration of a kind of loyalty which is most emphatically not dead: namely, the loyalty of the perpetually conscience-stricken American media to its progressive beau ideal, Bill Clinton. And the really great thing about being in this position of loyal media servants is that you also get to bash the media! For that is what all media people love to do more than anything, especially if it means that you show yourself to be so much better and wiser and perspicacious than your colleagues, and more in touch with "real people" who speak through the polls:

> The idea [writes Gates] that the great goods of truth and justice should sometimes bow to personal loyalty is actually something that a lot of Americans—call us Kohlberg's primitives—take for granted. But, then, that's what accounts for the values gap between our nation's moral elite and the laggard souls they hope to edify. It explains why most Americans admired Hillary Clinton's staunch display of solidarity with her errant, embattled husband—a display that our high scorers knew to be worthy only of derision. It explains why most Americans were sickened when Kenneth Starr commanded Monica Lewinsky's mother to give testimony that might inculpate her daughter.

So let's get this straight. Bill Clinton is an old-fashioned man of honor and a mensch. Like Gates himself, he is one of those "who prefer to distinguish politics from purification rites—and who just might, in a weak moment, rescue our own mothers from Godwin's burning house." Meanwhile Kenneth Starr is a weaselly John Dean type who thinks that the law and truth and justice should come before personal loyalty—"our legally deputized Stage Sixer," says Gates, "policing his fallen countrymen as they struggle with the gummy, vexed exigencies of the merely human." And aren't we all glad to see the human back again after the Puritan interregnum! Only, what a pity *The New Yorker* did not find all this out in time for it to do poor Richard Nixon any good!

Actually, it was not Godwin but Kant who sold Western man on the supremacy of disinterested justice. The latter's categorical imperative, that one must not act upon that maxim which one would not will to be universal, had already paved the way for mama's fiery demise. Interestingly, it also paved the way through a number of "premodern" virtues to the civil rights movement. I wonder if Gates would be equally disposed to celebrate the vexed exigencies of the merely human in the defender of apartheid who, on being told that he would not have said something if he were black, replied: "But I'm not bloody black"?

Not that I do not share his new-found admiration for the premodern. If he toasts Rose Mary Woods, I will be happy to toast Susan McDougal. There is a kind of naughty frisson about such admiration, which may be why it sometimes seems that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it is the Blumenthalian Left which understands the demands of those most conservative of virtues, loyalty and honor, better than the Republicans who so eagerly claim the mantle of conservatism and then spend their whole careers stabbing each other in the back. One needn't seek so far as David Brock for an example. The likes of Trent Lott or Arlen Specter seem to show in their attacks on Kenneth Starr that their forbidden but delightful pleasure is in backstabbing just for the sake of it, since it could hardly have seemed to promise them any political advantage. At least Brock, when he appeared on nearly as many talk shows as William Ginsburg and confirmed the existence of Mrs. Clinton's "right-wing conspiracy" was already beginning to count his thirty pieces of silver.

I don't mean to be too hard on Brock. In several ways, he is quite right. The original Troopergate story was a mistake if you start from the premise (as I would) of denying any legitimate interest of the public in the private lives of its elected officials. But he conveniently leaves out of consideration the fact that that is not where we were starting from in 1993. We were starting from the point of the massive feminization of American politics which had taken place during 1991 and 1992—from Clarence Thomas vs. Anita Hill on live television to "the Year of the Woman." It was not the notion of the Right that "the personal is political," but it would have been foolish of the Right not to play by the new rules once the feminists and the Left, together with the characteristically gullible media, had decided what the rules would be.

Besides, Bill Clinton, who had ridden the wave of the new politics of the Year of the Woman all the way to the White House, could not be allowed to get away with the stupefying hypocrisy of pretending to be a friend of the feminists while treating the women in his own life worse than all but the most Neanderthal of Republicans. Clarence Thomas, even if you believed the charges against him, was a *preux chevalier* next to Mr. Bill ("Kiss It") Clinton, and *The American Spectator* would have been derelict in its duty to the American people not to let them know that. For it is the duty of that honorable but much maligned fellow, the partisan, to point out the faults, the errors, the sins, and even the peccadilloes of the opposition, and it is a slander and a calumny upon him to suggest that he cannot do it fairly, generously and with a genuine concern for justice.

For the desire to win does not entail unscrupulousness about the means of winning. It is only the intolerable smugness of the media about their own allegedly nonpartisan and disinterested ends which has given partisanship such a bad name. Even Rush Limbaugh describes the indifference to truth of the die-hard Clinton supporters with the adjective "partisan." One can only hope that the final outcome of this scandal will be such great discredit cast upon the media's vaunted nonpartisanship that genuine and honest partisanship will enjoy a measure of rehabilitation. It might put media critics like me out of business, but that would be a small price to pay if politicians would stop canting about "civility" and get back to the business of being partisan—or if journalists could stop going to all those meetings and symposia about how "concerned" they all are about their own moral rectitude and return to the business of manipulating clichés.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Books

Solti on Solti

by John Simon

Probably the best anecdotes from the music world concern conductors. They, more than composers or performers, are the hot center of comic interaction with musicians, composers, administrators, and audiences. They also often have epic rivalries with fellow conductors that give rise to exquisite putdowns. They are apt to display the prima donnaish caprices of star performers, the dictatorial *lèse majesté* of persons in charge of large aggregations, and the histrionic vanity of audience cynosures.

There are, to be sure, conductors whose public and private lives are modest, blameless, and unanecdotal, but they are rare. As his recent, posthumous *Memoirs* makes plain, Sir Georg Solti (1912–1997), a man of energy and ego, could not have been one of them.[1] Living and conducting to the ripe age of eighty-four, equally at home in the concert hall and opera house, and Hungarian to boot, he was a maestro of magnetic attractions and repulsions, and concomitant anecdotes. When you consider also his early and dramatic buffetings by history, his successive citizenships (Hungarian, German, and British), and his long tenures at the helms of far-flung orchestras operatic and symphonic, there was no way for comic or melodramatic incidents not to accrue around his persona.

He was born György Stern on October 21, 1912, in Buda, the sleepy town on the west bank of the Danube, as yet separate from Pest. With the outbreak of World War I, the family, which included his older sister, Lilly, moved to a provincial city, but by late 1918 they were back in exiguous quarters in Buda. Young Gyuri (the Hungarian for Georgie) had two fears: of uniforms, which "in Hungary always meant persecution," and of rats, which infested the Sterns' neighborhood. The father was an unsuccessful businessman, the mother a genius at making ends meet. Both were Jewish, the mother less orthodox than the father, but they never forced their son to practice their faith: "I did not rebel against it," he writes, "but then, as today, I disliked organized religion." In time to come, he changed his name to Solti.

He did not have much of a liberal education, but, even though he preferred soccer to practicing the piano ("there is something abnormal about children who like to practice instruments: they are either geniuses or, more often, completely untalented"), he did become a fine pianist, studying at the Liszt Academy under Bartók, Kodály, Dohnányi, about all of whom he has spirited comments. But his best teacher was Leó Weiner, a man so uncompromising that, even during a famine, he turned down *canned* chicken.

Solti was graduated from the academy "as a favor both to you and ourselves" and got a job as répétiteur at the Budapest Opera. Though mostly a pianist, he wangled his

1 *Memoirs*, by Sir Georg Solti, with Harvey Sachs; Knopf, 258 pages, $25.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

way into a little conducting despite anti-Semitic bylaws forbidding it. He had been, he says, "the best répétiteur ever . . . able to follow the worst singer to hell and back." Working with famous guest conductors was useful; a single "*Bene*" from Toscanini gave him one of his greatest joys, and helped make him the first unconverted Jew to conduct at the Budapest Opera since Hungary became a nation. His debut was with a *Figaro* in 1938, almost ruined by the Jewish Almaviva, who, during the intermission, had heard the grim news of Hitler's Anschluss of Austria.

At Antal Dorati's invitation, Solti got to conduct some ballet in London, though, not speaking a word of English, he had his problems. Among other things, he conducted *Carnaval* at Schumann's fast tempo indications and was advised to "get out before [the dancers] lynch you." A new anti-Semitic law got him fired from the Budapest Opera; even so, he was glad he turned down an offer to tour Australia with the ballet company of Colonel de Basil in 1939. This was the first of many times in Solti's life when he felt his actions "guided by what can best be described as a 'guardian angel.'"

In August 1939, when Solti was twenty-six, a rich Jewish friend gave him money to travel to Lucerne, where Toscanini was conducting, and ask the maestro to help him find a job in America. His father took György to the train station and began to cry. The son assured him he'd be back in ten days; actually, they never saw each other again. Toscanini promised to help; moreover, a telegram from Mother instructed Solti: *Don't come home!* He stayed in Zurich—which saved his life—for the next seven years.

He had a variety of odd jobs there, as pianist, piano teacher, or vocal coach, but he depended largely on the kindness of a few friends; for the Swiss in general, he has few warm words. Indeed, the words in *Memoirs* become more pointed here: a singer he coaches has "a voice like a castrated frog"; Hindemith, whom he meets, "seemed more like a Swiss banker than a composer." He's as sharp as the knife in a Swiss kitchen with which he severely cut one of his fingers. Since then, other than fixing himself two cups of morning coffee, he made it a point "never to go near a kitchen if I can help it."

In Zurich, Solti married his first wife, Hedi Oechsli. The daughter of a chemistry professor, she taught him much: "I was a late developer, really quite backward, and in some respects neither intelligent nor well educated . . . my mental level was more like that of a twelve-year-old." Above all, she encouraged his self-education through reading, a habit that stuck. Finally a job offer came from Stuttgart, which he first accepted, then dropped when a better one came from Munich. This was just the right time for a young conductor because the major maestros—Furtwängler, Karajan, Knappertsbusch, Krauss—had not yet been de-Nazified. To be sure, living was hard in postwar Germany. At one of those unheated Munich orchestra rehearsals, beads of sweat on Solti's forehead froze into icicles. At another time, Solti was so undernourished that he could make it to his fifth-floor walk-up only by being pushed by the gigantic orchestra porter.

In Munich, he earned guarded praise from Furtwängler; he did indeed have wonderful singers to work with, and learned a lot on the job. He got to know Strauss, who invited him to his house and gave him useful advice. "Why do you thrash about so when conducting?" Strauss asked. (The German *fuchteln* is stronger than "wave about," as Solti translates.) The composer, though almost blind and deaf, still conducted beautifully with utmost economy of gesture. Solti regrets having been too shy to ask some important questions; by their next projected meeting, Strauss was dead. Solti conducted at his funeral.

By 1951, the Munich powers wanted a German conductor. The aptly named Culture Minister Hundshammer offered a markedly less favorable contract. Solti ac-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cepted but on a street corner ran into Harry Buckwitz, a stage director and newly appointed manager of the Frankfurt Opera, who agreed to take him on as his music director. So Solti resigned from the Bavarian State Opera. Before Frankfurt, though, he accepted a guest appearance in Buenos Aires, adored his first airplane trip, and had amusing adventures during an anti-Perón revolt. In Dakar, on the way back, he almost lost his passport in the men's room, which, for the stateless person he then was, would have spelled disaster.

Rudolf Kempe having taken over in Munich, Solti flew directly to Frankfurt, which he perceived as a step down. He notes: "I could not have imagined I was about to begin one of the happiest and most productive periods of my life." To add to his happiness, he had signed a contract with Decca (London) records, with which he stayed to the end, making over 250 recordings.

Just outside Frankfurt, the Soltis had their first house, which Hedi tastefully decorated. There were two dogs and a faithful Hungarian retainer, Frau Zador, who remained a friend for life. For recreation, Solti played volleyball and bridge. His sister visited from Hungary, but, to his eternal regret, he let her return there to live out a precarious existence. In Frankfurt, it was the critic Theodor Adorno who converted Solti to Mahler and Bruckner, whose works became two of the conductor's specialties. He also taught him to appreciate such a piece as Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron* (which the book consistently misspells as "Aaron").

The American authorities asked Solti to give up his Hungarian citizenship (Hungary having gone Communist), and for some years he was stateless until Germany kindly granted him its citizenship. For this, he remained grateful even after he became a British subject. Thus he remained, upon being knighted, Sir Georg rather than Sir George.

He made his first American guest appearance in San Francisco, where he admired what Pierre Monteux had done for the orchestra. In Chicago, he conducted at Ravinia, where passing trains obtrude, and which Beecham called the only railway station with its own symphony orchestra. But the powerful—and ignorant—critic Claudia Cassidy, who harmed many, prevented Solti from being hired by the Lyric Opera Company. He also conducted in New York, prompting some remarks about Bernstein, whom Solti takes to task for relaxing discipline by encouraging orchestra members to call him Lenny.

Solti did not get along with the New York and Vienna Philharmonics, but admits that this was partly his fault: "I had not yet learned that . . . one's first task is not to stamp one's own personality on everything. . . . Today, if an orchestra gives me something better than what I had in mind, I . . . gratefully adopt it, but [then] I did not understand such things." But I wonder when—and whether—Solti ever fully learned this lesson. His clashes with strong artistic personalities are well known. He mentions in the book, with regret, never having got on with Jon Vickers and Giorgio Strehler, but he does not mention his extremely shabby dealing with the great Swedish tenor Jussi Björling, which is related in great and heartbreaking detail in the biography *Jussi*, by Anna-Lisa Björling and Andrew Farkas. Norman Lebrecht, in *The Maestro Myth*, quotes a singer on Solti's "streak of magnificent selfishness," and even Birgit Nilsson, who got on excellently with Solti, admitted, "He must have his own way."

As with Strauss, Solti had only one meeting with Stravinsky, and again feels that he wasted a golden opportunity to ask pertinent questions. Meeting once more with Bruno Walter in California, he allowed himself to be persuaded to accept the conductorship at Covent Garden: "The English will love you . . . but you will hate the climate." And so it was, though it took Solti a while to hit it off with David Webster, the Royal Opera House's manager, and overcome poor reviews, as when Peter Heyworth wrote that Solti conducted the *Ro-*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

senkavalier waltzes as if written for lame ducks. Meanwhile he was also hired as music director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic (he would have commuted between L.A. and London), but the meddlesomeness of Dorothy Chandler, the chairman of the board, who hired Zubin Mehta as assistant conductor without consulting Solti, made him quit, even though he liked Mehta.

He had had nine happy years in Frankfurt, when the general manager Harry Buckwitz himself said, "You're too good for us," and urged him to move on. In London, Thomas Beecham would have had some sarcastic comments—apropos Rafael Kubelik, he remarked unjustly that he wondered why Britain needed second-rate foreign conductors when it had plenty of second-rate British ones—but by the time Solti arrived at Covent Garden, Sir Thomas was dead. One of the first stage directors Solti worked with was Sir John Gielgud, and they got on splendidly, even though the heavy-accented Hungarian was intimidated by Gielgud's gorgeous English.

Solti introduced a new system of programming—two or three seasonal operas with talent booked three years in advance—much needed in this jet age with singers whizzing hither and yon. He did not immediately click with Benjamin Britten, but eventually did so; yet here again he repeats his pattern of insufficient discussion with composers about their works. His first *La Forza del destino* at Covent Garden was a disaster, including Carlo Bergonzi's wig coming off with his hat, but things duly improved, even if one critic described his *Figaro* as "a skater skimming over the surface of the music." A falling out with Rudolf Bing, who sided with his tenor Jon Vickers, prevented Solti from conducting at the Met.

Soon after the purchase of a house in Roccamara, on Italy's west coast, where the conductor was to spend some of his best times relaxing or studying scores, the twenty-year-old marriage of the Soltis began to unravel. The problem, it seems, "was a subtle psychological one: Hedi could not accept me as an adult. For her, I remained the overgrown Hungarian wunderkind . . . who had to be told how to behave in society and who could never be allowed to make his own choices in any sphere except the musical one." Well, perhaps so. The result: a difficult divorce, but an amicable parting. A few months later, in September 1964, Valerie Pitts, a TV journalist twenty-five years his junior, came to interview Solti, and, not much later, married him despite parental disapproval. It was to be a happy union that produced two daughters and lasted until Solti's death.

There were minor contretemps at Covent Garden. The highly realistic orgy scene in *Moses und Aron*, as staged by Peter Hall, upset the general manager David Webster and (for different reasons) even Solti, but the public loved the nude women and the blood. Maria Callas enraged Solti by refusing to sing, beyond the gala, the three other scheduled performances of *Tosca*, but he did not realize that she was vocally at the end of her tether. Incidentally, when Solti and Webster offered Callas *Lulu*, her comment was, "Berg? Terrible music!" She refused; probably just as well.

Like most prima donnas, Solti was not good at taking criticism; he did not read unfavorable reviews, though this took "a great deal of self-discipline." Typical is his comment on Andrew Porter, who, Solti writes, "never quite decided whether to like me or hate me." Solti, apparently, could not understand that it isn't about loving or hating him, but about evaluating particular performances, which, by everyone, are variable.

Here it should be noted that, though Solti got along well with the English, he felt that they could not accept his not being an amateur. To them, he claims, professionalism is suspect, and he quotes a remark he attributes to Vaughan Williams: "Anything that is worth doing is worth doing badly." But surely that is not a defense of poor performances, only a settling for less in difficult endeavors.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Be it said for Solti that he valued good singers, though more often if they were women. Birgit Nilsson, Anja Silja, Marie Collier, and Hans Hotter, among others, rate notable tributes. But he is equally outspoken about singers' inadequacies. For the 1963 recording of *The Ring*, he had the splendid Nilsson, Hotter, and Windgassen. In 1983, he had to settle for a much lesser cast, and his comments are fascinating. They lead to pertinent observations about Bayreuth: nowadays you cannot cast *The Ring*, and Bayreuth should produce operas by other German composers as well, so as to regenerate itself—"The Wagner Festival as such has outlived its time."

After ten years in London, Solti accepted the post for which we know him best at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. But for all his twenty-two-year tenure there, he did not give up his British citizenship, which would have meant, let us recall, the loss of his knighthood. The Chicago story is fascinating, but I must summarize it with how Solti assessed his three main achievements there: raising the musical standards of the CSO so as to earn international respect, making the city proud of its orchestra, and gaining financial security for the musicians even in their retirement.

Solti delivers himself of some eminently sensible judgments. Thus he condemns the distortion of operas by modern stage directors as "abominations," and deplores "that the conductors of my generation have not had the courage to stand up" to them. Yet I wonder whether he himself displayed enough of that courage. He shrewdly notes that the subscription series so popular with American orchestras are misguided, making some people attend innovative works they dislike merely because of season tickets, while keeping out many who would appreciate them. Hence so many bored and restlessly noisy audiences, and disturbing early departures. Wise, too, is the observation that an orchestra is made up not so much of its hundred players as of the fifteen first desks who lead them. Again, the smart rejection of the current mania for period instruments, "difficult to tune when modern instruments can be easily and properly tuned." It may not be indisputable that, as he claims, "it was generally accepted that Solti and the CSO were the best musical team in the United States," but neither is it a statement easily dismissed.

Finally, Solti ended—sadly—his long stay in Chicago, to become a free agent working less but stimulatingly in diverse places, each new orchestra, however, presenting problems of its own. In the closing section of his book, Solti describes his difficult leave-taking, and his refusal to take sides as to who should succeed him, Abbado or Barenboim, with the orchestra ultimately voting for the latter. But in his *A Life in Music*, Barenboim claims that already in 1983 Solti told him "he felt that I would be his natural successor." I am inclined to believe this: even enlightened autocrats prefer to be followed by obvious inferiors.

The last forty or so pages contain, besides the account of the final years (e.g., Karajan's keeping Solti out of Salzburg until he himself was getting too enfeebled), a compendium of Solti's provocative views on the composers he conducted, on what he liked or disliked about their various works, and, best of all, on how to conduct them. He notes also that, though lacking the visual memory of a Toscanini or Karajan, and the improvisatory skills of a Furtwängler or Nikisch, he was an architectural conductor, who constructed a performance from careful study of details and their assemblage toward a grand design; that, in short, he could "make any orchestra, good or bad, perform to the best of its abilities." That seems to me—at least when he was in good form, and the music congenial to him—a fair evaluation.

Solti is no doubt right also on the need for a true opera conductor to put in an apprenticeship as a vocal coach, and that "we conductors should always remember our roles as interpreters; we are there to serve with the best of our technical abilities the wishes of the composers, who are the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

creators." Beyond that, I salute the book's liminal remarks where Solti calls himself "lucky to have grown up in Hungary, a country that lives and breathes music." The luck motif recurs, charmingly and touchingly, as a sort of rondo at book's end: "I have had an enormously lucky life. I have said many times, and believe more every day, that I have a guardian angel who guides me and protects me. Looking back, there have been disappointments and unachieved ambitions, but all in all, I have had a wonderful time."

That wonderful time is well conveyed by this concise and entertaining book, whose numerous racy anecdotes I could not begin to touch on. *Memoirs* is written in the rousingly joyous style with which Solti conducted, and seems to have obtained good assistance from Harvey Sachs, Solti's collaborator on it. Yet Sachs might have circumvented such misuses as *fortuitously* for fortunately, and *enormity* for enormousness. Also a *lapsus calami*, or *thalami*, that has someone singing Florestan in *Die Walküre*, rather than in *Fidelio*, where he belongs. Such trifles aside, Solti would not have ranked his memoirs among his disappointments. For readers, only repeated references to projects Sir Georg did not live to realize should prove disappointing.

And one further, small blemish. The book ends with a tiny but moving afterword, in which Solti's widow and daughters report on Solti's death and their loss. Solti is referred to as Papa by daughters Gabrielle and Claudia; and by wife Valerie as Gyuri, which, as noted, is Hungarian for Georgie. But the guardian angel, having, alas, no jurisdiction over the printer's devil, allows the nickname to emerge as "Gyrui." Otherwise, this is a handsomely produced book, about which Sir Georg might have invoked the words of one of his favorite singers, Sir Geraint Evans, on the last Falstaff he sang under Solti's baton. In Evans's memoir, *A Knight at the Opera*, we read: "Everything came together just as I always hoped it would . . . the nearest to perfection that I could hope to achieve."

A Richardson round-up

Kenneth A. Breisch Henry Hobson Richardson and the Small Public Library in America: A Study in Typology. The MIT Press, 384 pages, $50

Margaret Henderson Floyd Henry Hobson Richardson: A Genius for Architecture. Photographs by Paul Rocheleau. Monacelli Press, 272 pages, $75

James F. O'Gorman Living Architecture: A Biography of H. H. Richardson. Photographs by Cervin Robinson. Simon & Schuster, 224 pages, $50

reviewed by J. Duncan Berry

A little over a decade ago, in the years framing the centennial of Mies van der Rohe's birth, three books were published which so advanced the state of scholarship on Mies that, all of a sudden, comparative understanding of Wright and Le Corbusier —if not of twentieth-century modernism itself—seemed glaringly inadequate. Franz Schulze's biography furnished a rigorous chronological framework and deep insight into the man; Fritz Neumeyer's investigation constituted, and remains, the richest intellectual biography of any modern architect; and Wolf Tegethoff's typological study carefully examined Mies's country houses. A nearly parallel publishing event has just occurred that has similarly transformed our understanding of the work of Henry Hobson Richardson (1838–1886), a man Lewis Mumford considered the greatest architectural mind since Wren. In the years since the Mies centennial, architectural publishing has evolved along an interesting path, and in many ways the new crop of Richardson titles offers more than just state-of-the-art research.

If his name is known at all by the public at large, it is probably in its adjectival form —Richardsonian. The Richardsonian Romanesque, typified by Boston's rough and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ruddy Trinity Church (1872–77), was a cultural achievement of such scope and magnitude that Mumford employed the sobriquet "Brown Decades" to characterize the epoch. The style is easily recognized by its aggressive massing and robustly rusticated medievalizing forms that are so powerful as to appear to be glacial deposits. He is regarded as our first genuinely "American" architect, an artist of the first rank who, through a skillful translation and transformation of traditional European stylistic vocabularies into indigenous materials, established an unmistakably American architecture.

The most enduring explanation of Richardson's achievement, based in many respects on Marianne Van Rensselaer's 1888 biography, was composed by Henry-Russell Hitchcock in the mid Thirties. It is a Romantic story about a Romantic artist-hero of prodigious appetites and accomplishments, a story that served to acclimate the American sensibility to what Hitchcock regarded as its natural extension: modernism. Richardson attended the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, the first important American after William Morris Hunt to set his sights so high, yet who by dint of Herculean willpower was able to slough off the thick dead skin of academicism (unlike Hunt) and develop his personal style into a commercial and critical success. This whole Romantic scenario is fun to read and encourages the coining of ever more strident superlatives to describe both the man and his buildings. The new generation of Richardson scholarship, typified in each of these fine studies, has the effect of retaining all of the sheer delight in Richardson's resplendent talent while significantly refining the way in which we understand not only the emergence of Richardson's mature style and the creation of a unique organizational *modus operandi* in his atelier, but also the way his work was originally received and what it offered to other talented designers drawn into his orbit such as Stanford White, Charles Follen McKim, and Alexander Wadsworth Longfellow. In this way, the authors considered here have essentially thrown open the possibility of reconsidering the full complexity and fascinating development of American architecture and urban planning in the first half of the twentieth century without the historicist distortions of the early modernist apologists like Hitchcock and Mumford.

Although some major Richardson works have been long lost to the wrecker's ball, there is still a sufficient number of important works to receive due attention by skilled contemporary photographers, and two of the works reviewed here present what amount to specially commissioned photo essays that function as almost parallel texts to the literary efforts that accompany them. Indeed, one of the more interesting developments in architectural publishing of late has been the attempted fusion of two previously irreconcilable types: the lavish coffee-table book and the scholarly tome. In fact, these titles offer equal billing to author and photographer. I am delighted to report that both the O'Gorman-Robinson and the Floyd-Rocheleau titles are exceedingly fine examples of this type of hybrid book for different, yet mutually reinforcing, reasons. Perhaps the most astonishing aspect is the wholly different approach toward architectural photography taken by Paul Rocheleau and Cervin Robinson.

Robinson's work, perhaps the most celebrated of any living architectural photographer, has graced the pages of numerous monographs and magazine articles, and has been the subject of several solo exhibitions; he also co-authored a path-breaking volume on the history of architectural photography. Beyond the requisite and ineffable luck necessary for all nonstudio work, Robinson brings an artistic personality and point of view almost as vivid and ebullient as Richardson's. One might say that at their best, Robinson's photographs convey more than the optical, that he pours all sorts of sensory data into his viewers' eyes by capturing elusive haptic information on tex-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ture, vague memory images of temperature, and even aural traces of faint echoes, footfalls, and whispers. So strong is his vision that certain architectural images are engraved into one's consciousness more forcefully in two dimensions than in three; I am referring specifically to the utterly grainless detail of the fireplace and clock at Richardson's New York State Court of Appeals on page 121. Such an image inevitably alters the way one sees Richardson. Robinson truly excels at finding the telling angle, seizing the eloquent detail, turning our attention to an artful composition within the composition. For some reason, however, Robinson's overall views are neither as convincing nor as informative as his close-ups. It may be that none is given the proper support in layout, or perhaps that large details are more inherently exciting due to the drama of inventive cropping.

Paul Rocheleau, an experienced and versatile photographer whose work has centered on a number of uniquely American architectural and cultural topics, has gone to great lengths to present a more intentionally objective visual assessment of Richardson's work. It is as if his ego is drained from the viewfinder and Richardson's presence becomes more fully felt. Rocheleau's even-handedness results in a more balanced documentary approach to the subject, and even when he allows himself an oblique vista or a juicy detail, one senses that it is indeed well within the spectator's ordinary physical experience of the building.

For me, one of the most interesting aspects offered by this photographic comparison is the contrasting images presented of Richardson's own touch. Robinson seems to "see" more of the Romantic protoexpressionist in Richardson and accordingly celebrates the rough-cut crusty bosses of Richardson's wickedly dramatic rustication. This intensely personal approach fits hand in glove with O'Gorman's sensitive and exquisitely turned biography. Rocheleau, by contrast, seems to take the long view, so to speak. In his work, we see Richardson as a man whose genius for geometry sings forth in every stringcourse and mortar bed, because each stratum of dressed stone is presented as the inevitable product of a singularly powerful presiding intellect. In its way, this perspective is also mirrored in Floyd's patient and meticulous verbal analysis.

Both books are also complementary in matters of content and style. James F. O'Gorman, the Grace Slack McNeil Professor of the History of American Art at Wellesley College, is a dominant presence in the history of American architecture. His contributions to the improved understanding of Richardson over the years have been legion, and, in the leisurely pace at which he plies his narrative, O'Gorman gracefully displays his truly remarkable command of his subject matter's potential nuances. Organizationally, the book is ingenious; as an expository writer O'Gorman has few peers. One can only think of the literary talent of the late William H. Jordy, who pithily characterized the "massive certainty and assertiveness" of Richardson and his work. O'Gorman's manifest ease as a raconteur and buoyant enthusiasm make *Living Architecture* a joy to read.

The late Margaret Henderson Floyd, formerly professor of art and art history at Tufts University, was a noted authority on New England architecture, with a special emphasis on her adopted town of Boston. Her recent *Architecture after Richardson* (1994) represents a unique accomplishment in American architectural history, and no doubt served as a convenient footbridge to this project. One experiences few of O'Gorman's verbal pyrotechnics in her account; in their stead one is treated to a sustained—indeed, a model—performance of tempered art historical reasoning and analysis from cover to cover. The signature elements of each phase of Richardson's career are fully, almost lovingly, described and traced back to antecedents and forward into mature works. Richardson's photographic collection offers an enormous mine for precise visual sourcing, and Floyd was clearly up to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the job. Gradations from Norman to Welsh Romanesque are parsed and declined with skill and care, and the Manoir d'Ango is presented as a red thread weaving together Richardson's Trinity Church, the Glessner House, and the Allegheny Jail. My reservations center on the ease with which she accepts certain findings concerning the influence of Japonisme, and on the somewhat weak organizational focus of the fourth chapter. It might have served her purpose better to break chapter 4 into separate sections treating distinct types. In addition, I would have also enjoyed a bibliography, but these are small objections. All in all, this is now the definitive source on Richardson. The text is clear, the abundant visual material is executed with the highest conceivable production values, and the result is a significantly improved understanding of Richardson as an architect and artist.

Most illuminating are those few places where each author takes a different position on the same material. The most salient area of contention appears to be Richardson's absorption and digestion of his French academic experience and the impact of Viollet-le-Duc. Until the pioneering work of Richard Chafee in the mid and late 1970s, precious little was known about the specific pedagogical techniques at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. If Chafee's important study of British and American pupils at the Ecole is ever published, it will no doubt fill in the gaping hole whose perimeter is suggested by Hunt's and Richardson's careers as *élèves*. For instance, O'Gorman sees the germ of Trinity Church in Julien Auguste Gaudet's winning Prix de Rome project of 1864. Gaudet, a friend and companion of Richardson in the Atelier André who was eventually installed as the Ecole's professor of theory and later penned the definitive theoretical statement of the Ecole's method, offers a tantalizing prospect for study, since clearly Richardson was employing the French modular method. By contrast, Floyd's illustration of the available English sources that Richardson probably saw is more compelling. Despite or perhaps because of his biographical emphasis, O'Gorman offers a picture of Richardson as a driven visionary, a goal-oriented artist. Floyd presents Richardson as a more equivocal and eclectic creator. The treatment of Viollet-le-Duc is also rather telling: O'Gorman presents Van Rensselaer's hearsay account of Richardson ending up in a Paris jail with Théophile Gautier due to their support of Viollet's incendiary lectures at the Ecole in 1863, but then immediately proceeds to minimize Richardson's possible interest. Floyd sees a wider range of accomplishment from which Richardson could and did draw inspiration, primarily Viollet's restoration of Carcassonne and his powerful if erratic primitivist inclinations. It is now clear that the time has come to reexamine the career, writings, and legacy of Viollet-le-Duc.

Breisch's typological examination of Richardson's libraries is necessarily more focused but, in comparison to the other authors' achievements, it is something of a letdown. Furthermore, one does not pass the seventh paragraph before Breisch's reflexively leftish politics are paraded about. Sadly, they never seem to retreat. Because Richardson's libraries were privately commissioned as municipal gifts, and because philanthropy perennially constitutes an insuperable blindspot for the anticapitalist mentality, one never gets the feeling that the author really understood his task. He can't seem to choke down the reality that the "overwhelmingly Anglo-Saxon and male, conservative Republican" sponsors of these institutions could be capable of a decent civic act; instead, he presents the entire constellation of moral, aesthetic, and economic impulses as a purely political phenomenon. The libraries, he argues, were simply a form of "conservative social activism" intended as "a means of maintaining cultural hegemony over the working classes." At any rate, although the politics are entirely as puerile and vulgar as I have suggested, the book has a good theme and an abundance of solid information. Despite glowing dust-jacket

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

blurbs regarding the study's so-called cultural value, it is when Breisch dabbles as a sociologist of style and stops conducting architectural history that his book collapses.

Poet of Paris streets

Jean-Paul Goujon Léon-Paul Fargue. Gallimard, 311 pages, 145 FF

reviewed by Katherine Knorr

The poet Léon-Paul Fargue (1876–1947) is something of a forgotten man in French twentieth-century literature. Although he both craved and disdained official honors, he was his own worst enemy when it came to his place in the world of letters, always late with his copy, presumptuous with his patrons, and inconsistent in his literary aims. The result is that his poetry books are difficult to find; he is remembered, if at all, for his brilliant essays on Paris and those funny poems about cats and frogs. Jean-Paul Goujon's excellent biography, published recently by Gallimard, tries to give due credit to this most difficult man who was, in his curious way, highly influential in a variety of artistic fields.

Any account of Fargue's life takes us across the much-mythologized cultural history of Paris, from nightclubs such as Le Chat Noir and, much later, Le Boeuf sur le Toit, with its talented and self-promoting crowd, to "scandalous" painting exhibitions, to Adrienne Monnier's lending library, and to the various salons where ladies of means, many of them American heiresses married to European titles, distributed money and petits fours in exchange for some place in literary-social history. In retrospect, Fargue figures in all such stories almost like a ghost, and that very evanescence gives this biography an interesting angle on the Paris that so many "cultural historians" have mostly misunderstood. One anecdote places him here, in a doorway, or there, near the piano; another places him on a divan, smoking and bathing his listeners in his intoxicating conversation, then disappearing on mysterious excursions for English cigarettes and Swedish matches, or to mail a letter and infuriate the tobacconist by asking to see the whole sheet of identical postage stamps and demanding, inevitably, the one in the middle.

Yet Fargue was, through his many friendships and collaborative undertakings, involved in the taste and direction not only of the literature of his time but also of the music—Debussy, Ravel, Satie, Stravinsky—and his uneven but enormously imaginative and evocative body of work surely has as much call to appear in Gallimard's Pléiade collection (from which it is presently excluded) as those of his onetime friends Valéry Larbaud and Alfred Jarry. As Goujon points out, Fargue has been ignored by the French Academy and ill-served by publishers, partly because the later years of his life were wasted on amusing but limited journalism, partly because he fits into no "school," and partly because, with the major exception of the late novelist André Beucler, he left no claque behind.

He was, as the cliché goes, a man of contradictions. He was a bad student with a brilliant mind, he was a habitual liar and a great teller of truths, he was avid for decorations to the point of appropriating those he had not received and at the same time a sharp satirist of vanity. He was a notorious moocher, and yet a generous man, helpful to young writers both with introductions to the famous and with the era's version of book blurbs. He was by many accounts extremely charming; his was unfortunately the sort of charm that goes with a talent for gossip, and he lost quite a few friends that way. He was a collector of aristocratic connections who was much happier with the conversation of barmen and concierges, those who described life with a colorful and violent simplicity. At heart, he was a deeply wounded man.

In some ways, he remained childish all his life. He never really held down a job, although he tried pretty much unsuccessfully to run his father's ceramics business, and he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lived off and on with his mother until her death at the age of ninety-three in 1935. He married only late in life, just before the Second World War.

Solitude and, especially, the lost paradise of youth, were the themes of most of his writing. Although his own early years were lonely and filled with a sense of insecurity, he remembered them with a warmth that permeated all his writing, notably in what is perhaps his most famous line: "On ne guérit pas de sa jeunesse" (which means, less elegantly put, that you don't get over your childhood).

Fargue was born out of wedlock in 1876 to a seamstress, Marie Aussudre. His father, Léon, was an engineer whose family would not accept the liaison, and although the elder Fargue created a family with his lover, he did not legally recognize Léon-Paul until 1892, and did not marry Marie until 1907. For Léon-Paul, this made for a life full of fears and questions, though he loved both his parents intensely, and there are echoes of them in many of the prose poems that deal with family such as those gathered in *Vulturne* (my translation):

> There was a family. Its life, its gay moments. Its child. . . . The window open to the sun. . . . Friends at their table, happy, at the coffee hour. Their return from work. The time of their toilette with their almond soap. . . . Their voices in the rooms, calling each other, their poor eyes, their humble gestures. They walked gently alongside life, in the sadness and the shame and the joy. . . . All of that, dddead!!

He was devastated by his father's early death in 1909, after which he wrote one of his greatest poems, "Aeternae Memoriae Patris," and sprinkled innumerable others with his guilt over all the things left unsaid and undone.

There are quite a few mysteries surrounding Fargue's schooling, and although Goujon has worked hard to elucidate them, he has gotten only so far. In later years, Fargue would boast of having been at *lycées* where he apparently never enrolled, and of having studied with the poet Stéphane Mallarmé. He seems to have polished up what was an indifferent record all the way up to the baccalaureate, which in those days was still a difficult and important scholastic achievement and which he failed. Still, he did meet in one of his various schools, in 1892, a young man who would change his life and secure his vocation, Alfred Jarry, eventually the author of *Ubu Roi* and creator of the absurdist Pataphysique. Fargue and Jarry were extremely close until a violent falling out in 1894, the precise reasons for which Goujon wasn't able to pinpoint. It is likely they were lovers, Goujon writes, and indeed for a time in his youth Fargue looked the part of the poetic faun (this will seem laughable to anyone who has seen photographs or drawings of the older Fargue, with his comb-over and his thick glasses).

Associated with this period is Fargue's first work, *Tancrède*, which brought him fame. First printed anonymously at the trailing end of Symbolism in the review *Pan* (October 1895 and March 1896), *Tancrède* is very much a young man's book, inevitably a bit precious and clearly tied to the Jarry years. Fargue later revised it a number of times, notably to remove anything suggesting homosexuality, which seems to have been for Fargue very much a passing phase of late adolescence.

Fargue appeared to be on his way, but he was a man with a deep attraction to failure, who started talking about writing more than he wrote. He did not publish again—aside from the odd piece in literary journals—until 1907, when the printing of the so-called *Premier Cahier* of his poems was organized by Pierre Haour, both friend and patron. Fargue characteristically sabotaged the publication with last-minute additions and deletions and imperious orders on the quality of the paper, all the while insisting that the book was someone else's idea and put together without his knowledge. The book was printed but never distributed. (As

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Goujon points out, dates of publication for various of these books are slippery because of revisions and changes of printers.)

This set a pattern: Fargue was chronically unable to produce what he promised, and unable to let go of what he did write. The publisher Gaston Gallimard, to whom he became very close, is said to have locked him in a room, to no avail: Fargue came out having written one line over and over. He did at last publish *Poèmes* in 1912 after working hard to foil the project, with the usual second thoughts and eccentric orders and counterorders. It was difficult, indeed saintly, to help Fargue. Still, such was his charm and his talent that people kept trying.

The second great friendship that marked his life was with the writer Valéry Larbaud, whose father owned the Vichy mineral water source. Larbaud, whom Fargue got to know well in 1909, helped Fargue survive financially and of course tried hard to get him published. Fargue provided the nightlife, the wild schemes and occasionally, it appears, the brothels specializing in little girls. He introduced Larbaud and the poet Paul Valéry to Adrienne Monnier, with whom he became friendly in 1916 (and with whose sister, Marie, he had a long liaison), but both friendships turned sour, mostly because of Fargue's love of gossip.

Although acknowledging that much of the more malicious gossip and lies were unpardonable, Goujon does defend Fargue's mythomania about his own achievements as a form of "revenge" against life. "By inventing a chimerical existence," he writes, "the poet gave himself a kind of satisfaction, at the same time as he erased the memories of disgraces and humiliations." He adds: "No doubt also he ended up sincerely believing his own fictions."

Fargue's consecration came with the publication in 1927 of a special issue of the review *Feuilles Libres* with homages from writers, painters, and musicians (and a letter purportedly written years before by Jarry, which Fargue seems to have written himself; Jarry, of course, was long dead). In 1928, he actually had four books at Gallimard: *Banalité*, *Vulturne*, *Epaisseurs*, and *Suite Familière*. He would never be quite so visible again.

To read Fargue's prose and poetry, the serious and the silly, is to step into a world deliriously playful and at the same time desperately sad in its evocation of the past. He loved the poetry of the quotidian, the throw-away line heard in the street. He loved the absurdly profound (and the profoundly absurd), he loved the names of things and of places. Having lived much of his life in the La Chapelle quarter near the Gare du Nord and the Gare de l'Est, he retained a fascination not so much for travel itself as for the idea and the infrastructure of travel. He saw the beauty in the powerful scenery of train stations, the bridges above the maze of tracks, the platforms and the *buvettes*, the hotels with their fog-dimmed lights, and the prostitutes. When he published *Le Piéton de Paris* in 1939, an absolute jewel of a book that is a personal history of the Paris he loved so well, it was a kind of autobiography.

A key to understanding Fargue is an appreciation of French intellectuals' love for *contrepèteries*, which can only be badly translated into English as spoonerisms. A good *contrepèterie* is obscene, and Fargue delighted in the use of witty obscenity, just as he did in the singsongy vulgarity of the street. Before the break with Adrienne Monnier, Fargue became involved in some of the team-translating of *Ulysses*. Although his translation didn't pass muster, at least partly because he introduced into the Molly Bloom soliloquy more obscenity than Joyce could take, the two writers enjoyed each other; they had in common the love of words gone haywire.

If so many Fargue anecdotes (more or less factual, of course) have come down to us, it is because in 1924 he met André Beucler, who, then in his mid-twenties, was delighted to discover the night world of the older writer. Beucler's recently reissued *Dimanche avec Léon-Paul Fargue*, which takes us—mostly in taxis rented for hours—from

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bouquiniste to restaurant banquette to pretentious cocktail party, is a minor work of genius, capturing all the color, humor, and depth of Fargue's endless conversation.

In 1943 Fargue had a dramatic stroke in a restaurant at a table with Picasso and others, and remained partly paralyzed until his death in 1947. He had to give up the restaurants and the taxis, and instead turned his home into a salon where, never far from his medicine and his telephone, he received guests while lying down.

There is much in Fargue's life that was sad, and this is a book that leaves the reader melancholy. Perhaps it is best to recall what Beucler referred to as "Farguiana"—the Fargue who loved the good things in life, food and drink and billiard halls and pretty ladies, and especially the Brasserie Lipp, where the ceramics had been supplied by his father. He was lyrical and earthy about all of it: speaking of a ripe Camembert, he called it "the feet of God." Years afterward, he could still describe the menus of elegant dinner parties: "trout patés, . . . civets of fresh salmon à la Vosne-Romanée, soups of veal kidney à la russe, stuffed *langoustes*, rubbed with garlic, gently roasted in the oven under a snow of parmesan, and served under the sun of Champagne."

Forthcoming in *The New Criterion:*

Reflections on a cultural revolution: a series
by Roger Kimball
Southern literature reconstructed *by Richard Tillinghast*
Women in politics: Madame de Staël *by Renee Winegarten*
The writings of Gertrude Stein *by Donald Lyons*
Nathanael West *by Mordecai Richler*
Fiction chronicle *by Brooke Allen*
New poems *by William Logan & John Foy*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Notebook

More smirk than Smirke: Colin Wilson's new British Library

by Francis Morrone

It is a truism that the destruction of London wrought by the Luftwaffe has been exceeded in the decades since World War II by the destruction wrought by developers and planning authorities. Among other things, London has been consecrated to the automobile. I remember a few years ago traveling from the blessedly car-free Venice to London. That first day in the English capital, I thought I would have a nervous breakdown. I momentarily despised the place, until I was reacclimated and felt, as I always do in the glow of London's peculiarities, that I was, spiritually, at home. Recent decades have seen London doubly ravaged, by the new architecture, often of the most hostilely Corbusian variety, and by the automobile.

Nowhere is London more ravaged than in the Euston Road stretching from the patrician quarter of St. Marylebone, along the northern boundary of Fitzrovia, toward Islington and Clerkenwell. Into the north side of the Euston Road, and, what's more, right next to the St. Pancras Station and Hotel, the distinguished modernist architect Colin St. John Wilson has obtruded his new, monumentally scaled British Library, easily the most discussed new building in London since World War II. The new library cost some half a billion pounds, making it the most expensive building ever erected in the British Isles. At 1.2 million square feet of floor area spread over an eight-acre site, it is "the largest civic building to be constructed in Europe this century," according to the library's own press release. It was conceived thirty-five years ago, and has been under construction for fifteen years. It practically swallowed whole the career of its well-known architect.

Throughout the period of its gestation and construction, word on the street was that it was an immense boondoggle. It was intended to accommodate thirty-five hundred readers, a number progressively reduced by two-thirds. It was intended to contain twenty-five million books, a number progressively reduced by half. At one point, with building well under way, the National Audit Office grew concerned that the project was eating up pounds at an alarming rate. It conducted an investigation that found an astonishing 230,000 construction defects. Three hundred kilometers of movable shelves that were in place had to be disassembled when it was discovered that their gear mechanisms jammed. Sprinklers had to be replaced when found to be inadequately rust-proofed. Two thousand miles of defective electrical cable had to be replaced or repaired. And so on. (The report exonerated the architect, and placed blame for the defects on the construction management team and its government overseers.)

Prince Charles famously likened the new library's design to an academy for secret police. He was among the less condemnatory voices to be heard. My favorite was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this, from the Rt. Hon. Gerald Kaufman MP, on behalf of the House of Commons National Heritage Committee: "a Babylonian ziggurat seen through a funfair distorting mirror" and "one of the ugliest buildings in the world." Oddly, now that it is here and open, the press notices have been largely kind. Indeed, most people would agree that not only is it not "one of the ugliest buildings in the world," it is not even one of the ugliest buildings in the Euston Road. Sophisticated folk titter and groan whenever Prince Charles presumes to expostulate upon matters architectural, and probably did not even bother to notice that in the pages of *Perspectives on Architecture*, the excellent magazine issued by the Prince of Wales's Institute of Architecture, the more or less completed library received a cautious encomium. Colin St. John Wilson was held up as being the right kind of modernist architect.

As indeed in large measure he is, which is to say he takes his cues from Asplund and Aalto and not from Corbu and Gropius. Wilson's characteristic style is northern and blond, woody and white, airy and cheerfully bland. Given that this commission had to go to one of the high-echelon modernists, as opposed to, say, the Prince's darling Quinlan Terry, it is indeed well that Wilson, and not, say, Richard Rogers or Michael Hopkins, got the job. (And I've no doubt that Wilson's is a better building than anything Quinlan Terry would have managed under the circumstances.)

That said, this was a self-defeating job from the get-go, mostly because it is, well, so damned big. The St. Pancras complex is famously massive. Wilson's library, though it doesn't exactly dwarf St. Pancras, nonetheless is discernibly vaster. Something so ably demonstrated by the Beaux-Arts-trained architects of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly in the United States, was that an adapted classicism, skillfully employed, was the way to go in dealing with the vastness of many modern building types. In New York, for example, we have works like Grand Central Terminal and the New York Public Library, buildings that are larger and more complex than anything imagined in classical antiquity or the Renaissance. Yet Beaux-Arts classicism, so maligned by modernists, proved itself ideal for breaking down these buildings into ascertainable chunks. Modernist architecture, ostensibly evolved to give appropriate form to modern building types, has, to the contrary, been proved woefully inadequate in regulating large building masses, and modernism's greatest works, like some of Mies van der Rohe's or Frank Lloyd Wright's country houses, are on a small scale.

Today, by the quirks of history, the situation in architecture has got things reversed. Classical architects, of whom there are more than most people think, tend, since they have long been out of fashion, to work on a small scale. The modernists get the giant projects. Wilson tried hard, using an Aaltoesque vocabulary, to break down the masses of his library, to humanize its extraordinary bulk, and he did not exactly fail in doing so. Elements of his scheme seem to have been influenced by such Aalto works as the Otaniemi Institute of Technology (the entrance plaza), and the Vuoksenniska Church (the clock tower). (When one London wag likened the design of the new library to an outsize suburban DIY superstore, it only underscored how many suburban superstore designs are in fact degenerated forms ultimately derived from modern masters like Aalto and Wright.) I don't like the exterior of Wilson's building, but I respect the effort. Indeed, not only is it not the ugliest building in the Euston Road, but it is also, with the exception of the St. Pancras complex, the best building in that infernal thoroughfare.

It is fashionable to say these days that the exterior of the library is bad or bland or doesn't work, but that the interior is a triumph. This isn't too wide of the mark. The exterior tries hard. But the plaza seems problematic to me. In part, its brick pavers are too smooth, which means that on a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

typically moist London day you've practically got to wear hiking shoes to make it across the vast space without slipping. And if the pavers don't topple you, the horrible statue by Eduardo Paolozzi, of, we are told, Isaac Newton, surely will. Futhermore, the Paolozzi constitutes the only ornamental bit in what is otherwise a barren tundra; the plaza is simply a chore to have to traverse en route to the building's front door. The plaza of the old British Museum is a mess, too, but it's not so big as this, and is closely related to an energizing urban-neighborhood context with nearby stores and restaurants and so forth. The new library is of necessity turned in upon itself, since after all why would one want to engage the Euston Road? Thus the plaza affords views of St. Pancras's exuberantly variegated skyline, though of little else, and signals a complete break with the surrounding city. It should be noted, however, that Wilson did his level best visually to defer to St. Pancras, duplicating its salmon brick surfaces, and echoing its clock tower and that of the nearby King's Cross Station.

Inside the building proper, the sense of a self-contained world is palpable. In the lofty confines of the entry hall, one is confronted, first, by a veritable army of security sentinels (leading one first-day user of the reading rooms to remark that he felt he was in the Ministry of Truth), and, second, by an enormous tapestry (the largest woven in this century, the literature proudly proclaims) of R. B. Kitaj's painting *If Not, Not*. The hall is, with its Purbeck stone and travertine and acres of white walls, nicely appointed in that healthy Scandinavian way—Marimekko chic on a cosmic scale, and not displeasing for that. In fact, the details are quite elegantly designed and executed, with such touches as leather-covered stair-railings, African-teak door-handles, and so on.

As for the reading rooms, well, Wilson, who has said that he conceives of libraries as sacred spaces, designed the rooms to give off a whiff of the cathedral, with more than the occasional bow to the Frank Lloyd Wright of the Johnson Wax Administration Building and the Larkin Building. He wanted, it seems to me, to create multivalent spaces harmonized through an overall sense of vertical thrust. In other words, you want such spaces to possess both the nooks and crannies that may be desired by different temperaments among users, and at the same time to possess an overall grandeur or visual sweep. And in this the rooms largely succeed. They may not altogether escape the feeling of being slightly overlabored, which is unfortunately how much modernist architecture appears when it attempts this kind of formal breaking-down, but they are beautifully awash in natural light, and elegantly appointed. Not least, they are not, nor is the library as a whole, in thrall to the new technology of electronic information retrieval. This has actually elicited as much criticism as has come from the traditionalist devotees of the old round reading room in the British Museum. Indeed, the centerpiece of the main hall, around which the reading rooms are arrayed, is the six-story black-glass stack containing George III's library, bequeathed to the nation on condition that it be kept together and separate from the rest of the collections. With the tooled spines of several thousand old books forming the visual focus of the main public space, there is no question of which side of the technological divide the British Library has chosen to come down on, and that is refreshing.

Wilson's library, conceived purely as an architectural object, may in fact be the equal in quality to Robert Smirke's British Museum. But unlike the museum, the library is in but not of London, and this, ultimately, is what disquiets. Of course, many buildings in London are in but not of London—especially in an area like the Euston Road. But there is, or should be, something different about a library. The best libraries—Labrouste's at Ste. Geneviève, Carrère & Hastings's at 42nd Street, McKim's at Copley Square—embrace, and are embraced by, their urban contexts. Nikolaus Pevsner

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wrote of the nineteenth century's "new faith in humanism, its great respect for Bildung and its new democracy of learning." The capital of the "democracy of learning" was London, its urbanism characterized by the jumbling together of its humanistic institutions and the more quotidian functions of the metropolis. The new library, for all that it adds to this London urbanism, might as well be in Manchester.

Significantly, back in the Fifties, Colin Wilson's mentor and one-time partner, Sir Leslie Martin, proposed (as had Nash more than a century before) the clearing away of the urban jumble of shops, restaurants, houses, pubs, and offices that the museum faces across Great Russell Street for several blocks—a plan that Pevsner pronounced "emphatically right." This would have wiped out what are today some of the most characterful and lively streets in this area of London, streets now populous with good restaurants and antiquarian bookstores and romantically appealing in the heavy shadow of the looming museum. The urban scene there is better, as Jane Jacobs might note, than anything that might ever have been planned. The principal architectural virtue of the museum is not its monumental aspect, suggestive of a more spacious setting, but the manner in which it genially embraces its surrounding urban jumble. It is the absence of this vital jumble together with the library's consequent self-containment that leave one less than wildly enthusiastic about the new building's contribution to London urbanism.

A lot of what turned people off about the new library was that it was replacing the dear, beloved round reading room in the British Museum. (The round reading room was designed by Sidney Smirke, the brother of the museum's architect, together with the librarian Sir Anthony Panizzi, and added to the museum in 1857, a decade after the elder Smirke's work had been completed.) Two things about that. First, neither the round reading room nor the elephantine Greek Revival building housing it is of any but middling architectural merit. The reading room's cachet is owed mostly to its sentimental associations, and of those it is largely that Karl Marx wrote *Das Kapital* there that brings a tear to the English socialist's eye. Second, the reading room shall be with us still. It's not being destroyed. Rather, it will function in a new context, as a public reference room and centerpiece for a reworking of the British Museum's interior courtyard by the interesting if sometimes frightening English architect Sir Norman Foster.

Norman Foster's British Museum courtyard project is one of about sixty or so major new projects in and around London that are described in an exhibition this past December and January at the Lothbury Gallery in the City. Across the street from Herbert Baker's Bank of England, the gallery is housed in one of London's most luscious Beaux-Arts interiors (designed by Mewès and Davis, architects of the Ritz on Piccadilly) that serves as the lobby of National Westminster Bank, operator of the not-for-profit exhibition space. The exhibit in question was "London: The New Millennium," and it was a bit of an event for the people of London, as they got a good look at, among other things, how their city is going to look as it rounds the millennial bend, and, more mundanely, where all that new lottery money is going.

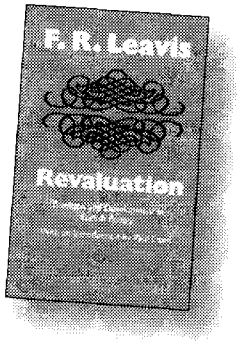
Though there are many gifted designers in London, including practitioners of the thoughtful modernism promoted by the Prince of Wales's Institute of Architecture, the powers that be would rather take their cues from the academicians of the Architectural Association. And so, when the Victoria and Albert Museum needs to be expanded, it's Daniel Libeskind who gets the call. His Boilerhouse addition, known, ominously, as "The Spiral," as though it were a nightclub or one of those inscrutably totemic objects in a science-fiction novel, looks remarkably like a piece of crumpled paper. It's the sort of studio project that architecture students stay up all night trying to concoct after their professor has inspired them with a Xeroxed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

One of the century's great critics, now back in print

F. R. LEAVIS

Revaluation
The Living Principle
The Critic as Anti-Philosopher



Three of Leavis's most trenchant collections of literary criticism, all with introductions by Paul Dean. The subjects range from Donne and Keats to T. S. Eliot, the nature of thought and language, the idea of the university, and the predicaments of contemporary civilization. "Leavis's great strength as a critic lies in his loving, delicate, discriminating probing of a writer's fusion of language and thought."—*New York Times Book Review.* "No twentieth-century critic has been more insistent that the function of literature is ultimately moral, and that criticism must always be to a large extent a form of moral discrimination."—John Gross.

Just published in paperback at $16.95 each

Ivan R. Dee, Publisher Chicago
At your bookseller, or order toll-free 1-800-634-0226 with a major credit card.

handout of four pages from a book by Jacques Derrida. Anyway, the V&A, long one of the most admirable of the world's museums, has bought into it: "an iconic building," they call it, "destined to enliven the urban landscape of South Kensington." Fortunately, it looks rather as though Libeskind's addition is going to be pretty well swallowed up by the V&A itself, that hulking beast of a building, kin to St. Pancras. It's the idea—Daniel Libeskind designing for the V&A—that makes one bridle.

In this new batch of mostly lottery-funded projects, Sir Norman Foster's is a name that pops up more than once, and it could be worse. Take for example his Millennium Bridge, which spans the Thames at Bankside (where Herzog & de Meuron have refitted the old Bankside Power Station to house the new Tate Gallery). The bridge, adorned, if that is the word, with sculptures by Sir Anthony Caro and replete with some snazzy lighting effects, looks like it might be an elegant addition to the views along the Thames. Foster is also in charge, as I mentioned, of the British Museum courtyard redesign, and is a major player in the long-awaited planned makeover of the heart of the Spitalfields district.

Alas, the name most often inscribed on the wall placards at the Lothbury Gallery was that of Lord Rogers. He may be granted his long wish to redevelop the South Bank Centre. And under the guise of something called the Millennium Experience, Greenwich Peninsula is slated to be transformed into what might more appropriately be called the Richard Rogers Experience. This is an enormous structure, fast taking shape, in which twelve giant yellow cranes or "masts" hold in place a vast domed canopy "big enough to accommodate 13 Albert Halls." "The largest structure of its type in the world" (but what is its type?), it looks like the world's largest pincushion. And that may not be the worst of it. The structure's purpose is to house a spectacle, devised by Sir Cameron Mackin-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tosh, with which the millennium is to be greeted.

Lord Rogers clearly wishes to make London over into a monument to his own ego, but what impresses most about the projects outlined in "London: The New Millennium" is how most of them are relatively modest, including several very welcome restorations and renovations (though nothing, so far as I can tell, to rival New York's prodigious feats of rehabilitation at Central Park, the Public Library, and Grand Central Terminal). So the beginning of the new millennium looks to be little different from the end of the present one. If you feel the need to get away from millennial fever, take a stroll across Hampstead Heath to Robert Adam's great Kenwood House. Recently, the splendid Iveagh Bequest—which includes a Vermeer, a first-rate Rembrandt self-portrait, and excellent portraits by Hals and Van Dyck—has been supplemented by an indefinite loan of seldom-seen pieces from four different private collections, some of which have not been publicly exhibited since 1957. Included are works by, among others, Memling, Botticelli (a more or less solidly attributed Madonna and Child), Paris Bordone, Dirk Bouts, the Master of Moulins, and the Master of Hoogstraten. The combination of great paintings, the blazing green of the Heath, and the Adam architecture will remind you of what London is about at its best.

Editor's note: We wish to call attention to the publication this month of *Without*, by Donald Hall (Houghton Mifflin, $22), portions of which first appeared in *The New Criterion*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

edited by Richard John Neuhaus

FIRST THINGS

"...a pungent brew of moral earnestness, brilliance, wit, palaver, news, frivolity, poetry, and political horseradish..."

— Thomas C. Oden, Drew University

Discover a journal that gives you a fresh and refreshing look at today's most important religious and moral questions.

From abortion to post-modernism FIRST THINGS engages you in a lively and profound conversation about the ordering of public life.

12 Issues of First Things RISK FREE

❑ **YES!** I'd like to try this sprightly, outspoken source of ideas and insight on religion and society. Please enter my 12-issue subscription (one year, plus two bonus issues) for only $19.95 — more than $25 off the newsstand price.

NO RISK, FULLY GUARANTEED If I am not absolutely delighted with my First Things subscription, I'll receive a full, prompt refund on all unmailed

NAME _____ ☐ **Payment enclosed** 6NC498

ADDRESS _____ ☐ **Bill me**

CITY/STATE/ZIP _____ Charge my: ☐ VISA ☐ MasterCard

Card # _____

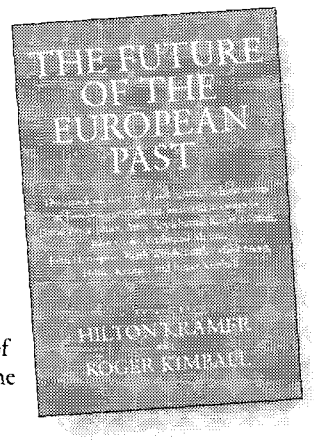
Expiration Date _____

FIRST THINGS * P.O. BOX 3000 * Denville, NJ 07834

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A major contribution to the most important cultural debate of our time

The Future of the European Past



Edited by HILTON KRAMER *and* ROGER KIMBALL

In essays first published in *The New Criterion*, ten distinguished critics analyze the attack on the moral and cultural achievements of European civilization. From the decline of historical memory to the sway of pop culture to the pervasiveness of deconstruction and structuralism in academic inquiry, these trenchant reflections—marked by wit, independence, and commanding intelligence—define the struggle and assess the fate of our cultural legacy. The contributors include David Pryce-Jones, Anne Applebaum, Roger Scruton, John Gross, Ferdinand Mount, John Herington, Keith Windschuttle, Mark Steyn, Hilton Kramer, and Roger Kimball.

Ivan R. Dee, Publisher
Chicago 60622
At your bookseller, or order toll-free 1-800-634-0226 with a major credit card.

COLISEUM BOOKS

NAMED BY NEW YORK MAGAZINE "THE BEST BOOKSTORE IN NEW YORK"

OPEN SEVEN DAYS AND EVENINGS
1771 BROADWAY (at 57th Street)
(212) 757-8381
WE SHIP WORLDWIDE
ORDER TOLL FREE (800) 833-1543
E-MAIL NYCOLBOOKS@aol.com

Back issues of
The New Criterion
are for sale at $6 each.

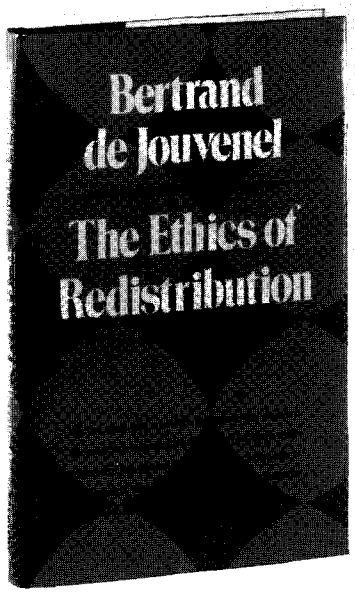
A list of highlights is available upon request from the Office Manager.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Modern Scholarly Editions of Classic Works for Today's Readers

On Power
THE NATURAL HISTORY OF ITS GROWTH

By Bertrand de Jouvenel
Foreword by D. W. Brogan
Translated by J. F. Huntington



Documenting the process by which government and controlling majorities have grown increasingly powerful and tyrannical, Bertrand de Jouvenel (1903-1987) demonstrates how democracies have failed to limit the powers of government. This development Jouvenel traces all the way to the days of royal absolutism, which established large administrative bureaucracies and thus laid the foundation of the omnipotent state of the present era.

On Power is an important work by one of the great students of social and political life and thought in our time. Of the work, Professor Angelo M. Petroni of the Luigi Einaudi Center for Research in Torino, Italy has said, "*On Power* is simply a book that no serious scholar of political science or political philosophy can afford to ignore.

444 + xxii pages. Foreword, translator's index.

Hardback	$25.00	0-86597-112-9
Paperback	$ 8.50	0-86597-113-7

"Conceived in Liberty"

For a nation "conceived in liberty," the study of the ideal of a society of free and responsible individuals is a never-ending obligation. To encourage this deliberation, Liberty Fund—a private educational foundation established in 1960—makes available a wide range of outstanding books. In keeping with the Fund's mission, books are both beautifully produced and priced to ensure their availability to all serious readers. Each title explores some aspect of the interrelationship of liberty and responsibility in individual life, society, governance, or economics. Accordingly, our publications include the works of Adam Smith, David Hume, Lord Acton, Ludwig von Mises, Nobel laureates F. A. Hayek and James Buchanan, crucial political writings of the American founding era, and other landmark works in philosophy, law, social and political thought, and education. We invite you to request a free copy of our catalogue.

Call 800-955-8335
Fax 317-579-6060
or write:

Liberty Fund INC

We pay
UPS shipping on
prepaid orders.

8335 Allison Pointe Trail, Suite 300, Dept. NEW7, Indianapolis, IN 46250

Explore Liberty Fund's catalogue on the World Wide Web
at www.Libertyfund.org

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"SERIOUS AND LIVELY, SCHOLARLY AND POPULAR, ECUMENICAL

AND PARTISAN... *THE CHESTERTON REVIEW* IS A REBUKE TO THOSE WHO SUPPOSE THAT SERIOUS WRITING CANNOT BE FUN TO READ OR THAT AN ORTHODOX VIEWPOINT MUST BE A NARROW ONE."

– ROBERT P. GEORGE
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICS
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

"One of the best quarterly Reviews—if not the best—currently in existence."

– BARBARA LUCAS WALL

The Chesterton Review

The journal of the G. K. Chesterton Institute

Subscribe now and save up to 30% off the ordinary subscription rate. *Plus* this Special Offer for new subscribers: for each $38.00 subscription to our quarterly, the new subscriber *will also receive a freee copy of one or more of the following special issues (c. 300 pages):*

❑ 20th Anniversary
❑ C.S. Lewis
❑ David Jones
❑ Vincent McNabb

or two of our regular special issues (144+ pages each)

❑ Karl Kraus & Aurel Kolnai
❑ Japanese Christian Writers
❑ New Chesterton Manuscript
❑ Uncollected Father Brown Story
❑ Chesterton's Schooldays
❑ Christopher Dawson
❑ Charles Dickens
❑ George Grant
❑ Cardinal Manning
❑ Father Brown

Or the book:

❑ Chesterton and the Modernist Crisis

Please enter my membership to the *Chesterton Review* for one/two years at $38.00 per year.

❑ One year ($38.00) ❑ Two years ($70.00)

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State ..... Zip Code .....

Charge to VISA or Mastercard .....

Expiry date .....

Make cheque payable to: Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI) P.O. Box 4431, Wilmington, DE 19807. You can also order the *Review* with a Visa or Mastercard by calling 1-800-526-7022 or by e-mail inquiries at isi@isi.org.

The Chesterton Review is the joural of the G. K. Chesterton Institute, 301 Allen Avenue, P.O. Box 802, Meriden, CT

TCR1597

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Hudson Review

Spring 1998 $10 • $12 Can. • £8

50th Anniversary Issue

American Themes

Joseph Epstein on George Washington
Susan Balée on American Autobiographies
Harold Fromm on Wilderness and Technology
Dana Gioia on Learning from Robert Fitzgerald
William H. Pritchard on Raymond Chandler
Thomas M. Disch on Postmodern Fiction
Mark Jarman on Wallace Stevens
Karen Wilkin on David Smith

Poems by Hayden Carruth, Dana Gioia, Emily Grosholz, John Haines, Anthony Hecht, Mark Jarman, Maxine Kumin, Robert McDowell, David Mason, Louis Simpson, Charles Tomlinson

Story by Gary Krist **Memoir by** Jocelyn Bartkevicius

Articles and Reviews by Bruce Bawer, Bert Cardullo, Robert S. Clark, Josiah Fisk, Dean Flower, R.S. Gwynn, Richard Hornby, John Loughery, David Mason, Marcia B. Siegel

A magazine of literature and the arts

The Hudson Review, 684 Park Avenue, New York 10021

I wish to buy _____ 50th Anniversary Issue(s) of THE HUDSON REVIEW at $10.00 each. I enclose a check or money order in the amount of $_____.

I wish to subscribe to THE HUDSON REVIEW. I enclose a check or money order in the amount of $_____. One year subscription $28 ($32 foreign), two years $50 ($58 foreign), three years $72 ($84 foreign).

Name _____

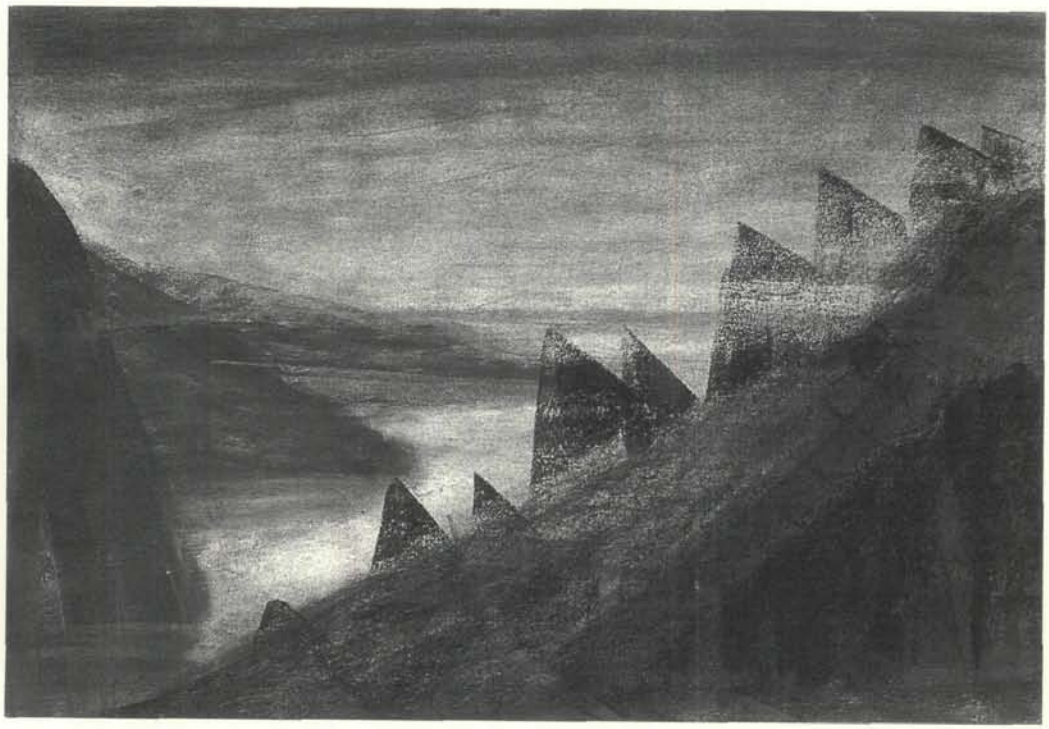
Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ERIC FONTENEAU

Right before the Wolves – Drawings – Installation



Right before the Wolves
(no. 15)
Charcoal on paper
18⅞ x 22 1/16 inches
(38 x 58 cm)

First New York exhibition, 16 April – 16 May 1998

fully illustrated hardcover catalogue available $20 ppd

ACHIM MOELLER FINE ART
167 EAST 73RD STREET NEW YORK NY 10021
TELEPHONE 212 988 8483 FAX 988 8480

ADAA member
Art Dealers Association of America

The New Criterion
850 Seventh Avenue
Suite 400
New York NY 10019

Periodicals Postage
Paid at New York, NY
and at additional
Mailing Offices

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED